

**Sexuality in the Middle Ages  
and Early Modern Times:  
New Approaches to a  
Fundamental  
Cultural-Historical and  
Literary-Anthropological  
Theme**

*Edited by  
Albrecht Classen*

**Walter de Gruyter**

## Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times

# Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture

Edited by  
Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge

3



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Albrecht Classen  
(University of Arizona, Tucson)

## The Cultural Significance of Sexuality in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Beyond. A Secret Continuous Undercurrent or a Dominant Phenomenon of the Premodern World? Or: The Irrepressibility of Sex Yesterday and Today<sup>1</sup>

### 1. How to Justify the Cultural-Historical Research on Sexuality?

Why should we talk about sex, or sexuality in more general terms, as a historical phenomenon?<sup>2</sup> Why would such a ‘sordid’ topic, as some conservative critics might argue, and certainly have argued throughout the centuries—see the long and unbroken tradition of clerical condemnation of sexuality as one of the worst sins in human life—be of any relevance for the study of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the early modern age? To raise this issue also provides the immediate answer because no aspect of human life is meaningless, and everything we can learn about people in the past allows us to gain a more comprehensive and more complex picture, especially if our investigation leads us into the realm of people’s motifs, secret plans, hidden agendas, emotions, and dreams. If we can explain why certain actions were taken, certain laws issued, concrete institutions established, and various programs carried out we gain considerable insight into

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<sup>1</sup> For her critical readings of this introduction, I would like to express my gratitude to Marilyn Sandidge, Westfield State College, MA. Rasma Lazda-Cazers, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, made some good suggestions for which I am very thankful. Allison P. Coudert, University of California at Davis, challenged me constructively to revisit the Elias-Duerr debate, which I found very fruitful. See also my separate exploration of this issue in my contribution to this volume (“Naked Men”).

<sup>2</sup> For a recent, despite its brevity quite comprehensive article on this subject matter, see Edward D. English, “Sexuality and Sexual Attitudes,” *Encyclopedia of the Medieval World*. Vol. II: M to Z (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 663-64; further research literature there.

the complex structures of all of human life, taking us deeper down to the fundamentals than most chronicles or official documents ever could.<sup>3</sup>

Edward M. Brecher cites W. C. Fields for one of two mottos to his survey study of *The Sex Researchers*, which explains a lot about the relevance of sexuality in and for human life: "Sex isn't the best thing in the world, or the worst thing in the world—but there's nothing else quite like it."<sup>4</sup> Bans and laws against specific sexual practices, particularly sodomy and not allowed positions during copulation, are not only relevant for the history of the legal system within a society, but they also illustrate what people were afraid of concerning their moral and ethical principles and values.<sup>5</sup> The entire penance system of the Catholic Church, for instance, powerfully illustrates, at least indirectly, what people did in private and what their fantasies aimed for, at least according to the clerical writers who labored hard on the topic of sexuality as a human vice, or rather sin that deserves to be punished as soon as it was practiced for any other purposes but to create a child.<sup>6</sup> The famous Franciscan preacher Berthold von Regensburg (ca. 1210–1272), for instance, repeatedly warned against sexual transgression which would threaten peace among people: "Daz ist allez ungeordent fride mit dem fleische, sô mit griffen, mit bösen gebærden, mit unkiusche, mit trâkheit an gotes dienste: daz ist allez valscher fride, ungeorderter fride mit dem fleische und ist der sêle tôt" (That is all disorderly peace with the flesh, such as with grasps, with evil gestures, with unchastity, with laziness in the service for God: that is all false peace, disorderly peace with the flesh and is death for the soul).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See the massive project *Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby, trans. Arthur Goldhammer. A History of Private Life, II (1985; Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988). Unfortunately, none of the contributors fully engage in a critical investigation of why the history of private life would be of such a significance for us today.

<sup>4</sup> Edward M. Brecher, *The Sex Researchers* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1969). In his epilogue he states unequivocally: "The future of sex in our culture will depend only in small part on what we teach our children about sex in the sixth grade, or in high school or college. Far more important is the establishment of a milieu in which even quite young children can develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-acceptance—including an acceptance of their own bodies, and of their sexual feelings" (318). To this I would like to add that a cultural-historical awareness of the discursive nature of sexuality in the past will also contribute to the fostering of a healthy society which embraces sexuality as a natural aspect of all (human) life, both in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and today. See also Vern L. Bullough, *Science in the Bedroom: A History of Sex Research* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), though he mostly skips over the premodern period.

<sup>5</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Peter Dinzelsbacher.

<sup>6</sup> For a broad collection of relevant texts, such as ecclesiastical sources, legal sources, letters, chronicles, biographies, conduct books, literary sources, and medical writings dealing with love, marriage, and sexuality, see *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook*, ed. Conor McCarthy (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> *Berthold von Regensburg: Vollständige Ausgabe seiner deutschen Predigten mit Einleitungen und Anmerkungen von Franz Pfeiffer und Joseph Strobl. Mit einer Bibliographie und einem überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Beitrag von Kurt Ruh. Deutsche Neudrucke. Reihe: Texte des*

The penitentials, a huge corpus of legal texts all by themselves, addressed sexual transgressions both outside and within marriage, sexual perversions, and sexual crimes.<sup>8</sup> Bishop Burchard of Worms (950–1025), in his massive *Decretum*, outlined in greatest detail and without any hesitation all possible sexual activities and identified exactly what penalties a priest had to impose on each of them;<sup>9</sup> all this determined by the concept that any sexual practice that was not exclusively aimed to create children was considered sinful.

The list of other penitential writers, such as Honorius of Autun (ca. 1080–ca. 1156), Gilbert de la Porée (ca. 1075–1154), Abbot Guibert of Nogent (ca. 1064–ca. 1125), is legion, and they all, consistently, embraced the same negative viewpoint regarding the disastrous consequences of sexuality for human spirituality.

As James A. Brundage poignantly summarizes, reflecting on the broad genre of penitential writings: “We are burdened and doomed, according to Guibert, by sexual fantasies that spring unbidden to our minds, even in sleep; sordid desires subvert our efforts to attain chastity and plunge us into ever deeper despair. Sex is a vice and a disease, Guibert believed; it taints and befouls every living person. Even when death finally delivers us from the grasp of lust, it is likely to pitch us into hell.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the penitentials are filled with strictest warnings against the temptation and seductive force of human concupiscence, which allows us today, here entirely disregarding all moral and ethical, not to speak of theological, implications, to gain good insight into the world of sexuality, at least indirectly and as far as it was imagined by the representatives of the Church.<sup>11</sup>

In a fourteenth-century preacher’s handbook, for instance, copied down numerous times, hence of great popularity at its time (twenty-eight manuscripts, the last copied by the end of the fifteenth century), we read the stern warning against lechery:

In spiritual terms, this beast [Revelations 13 – A.C.] is fleshly concupiscence, which rises from the earth of our flesh and has two horns, namely gluttony and lust, which

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Mittelalters (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965), vol. 2, 127. For a solid introduction to this sermon author, see Frank G. Banta, “Berthold von Regensburg,” *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd, completely rev. ed. by Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1978), 817–23.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550–1150*. (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Burchard of Worms, *Decretorum libri XX*, PL 14: 557–1058.

<sup>10</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of London Press, 1987), 185.

<sup>11</sup> Aaron J. Gurjewitsch, *Mittelalterliche Volkskultur*, trans. Matthias Springer (1981; Munich: Beck, 1987), 149–51 (3rd chapter); see also the English trans. *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*. Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture, 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).



do not look very terrifying and yet are quite deceptive. They are like the horns of a wanton lamb, because they invite to wantonness and yet in the end lead to insolence.<sup>12</sup>

As to fornication, the author offers the following, not unexpected comments:

People who claim that simple fornication is not a mortal sin because it is a natural act have to be shown the following three arguments in order: first, that it is absolutely forbidden; second, that it must be completely rejected; and third, that it has been called “diabolical” by the Lord.<sup>13</sup>

Responding to some people’s comments that they are compelled to fornication, he replies that they are either in the clutches of the devil, or in those of a woman, or in that of their own flesh, and against each of these there are ways to combat the temptation, irrespective of the fundamental truth: “it follows that a man is led to commit fornication by the wickedness of his own flesh and not through anyone else.”<sup>14</sup> More interestingly, the preacher-author not only examines the larger issues pertaining to sexuality, he also investigates the implications and necessary punishments of rape (VII.viii); adultery (VII.ix); incest (VII.x); and sodomy (VII.xi), obviously fully aware of the reality within his own parish and trying to provide theological and legal arguments for his audience, other preachers.<sup>15</sup> But the problem became acerbated by the late Middle Ages when increasingly priests themselves were often accused of having been involved in sexual transgressions.

Not surprisingly, the delegates to the Council of Trent (1545–1563) voted for a much more “repressive machinery . . . to enforce the legislation passed at Trent.” The reasons were many-fold, among them the growing number of women who went to confession and who were thus more subject to sexual solicitation than ever before.<sup>16</sup> Although the Inquisition intensified its work, aiming at eradicating the immoral behavior of the priests, numerous factors came into play to undermine the very efforts even long after the Middle Ages. As Stephen Haliczzer observes,

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted from *Fasciculum Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook*, ed. and trans. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), VII.vi, 665.

<sup>13</sup> *Fasciculum Morum*, VII.vi, 669.

<sup>14</sup> *Fasciculum Morum*, VII.vi, 675.

<sup>15</sup> See also the contributions to *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and A. J. Minnis. York Studies in Medieval Theology, II (York: York Medieval Press; Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 1998); for a broad selection of relevant passages in various penitentials, see *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*. A trans. of the principal *libri poenitentiales* and selections from related documents by John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer (New York: Octagon Books, 1979). They do not include a reference to ‘sex’ in their index, but instead they list the individual sexual transgressions under their specific terms, such as ‘masturbation,’ ‘sodomy,’ or ‘prostitution.’

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Haliczzer, *Sexuality in the Confessional: A Sacrament Profaned*. Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

"more than two and one-half centuries of persecution by the Holy Office failed to end the problem of solicitation in spite of the fact that few priests could plead ignorance of the laws against it. If anything, by focusing attention on the confessional as a venue for sexual activity, the Inquisition may have eroticized confession."<sup>17</sup>

In fact, the problem has never ceased, and continues to vex the Catholic Church even today: "In the present-day Church, sexual scandals continue, but they stem entirely from the continued insistence on celibacy and take place in locations outside the orbit of confession, in seminaries, schools, or apartments."<sup>18</sup> This seems even more surprising considering the long history of the struggle of the Church against the body and sexuality as the most dangerous aspects for the salvation of the human soul. From early on the clerical discourse "accepted sexual activity in marriage as necessary, perhaps even capable of some good, but at the same time was often permeated with distrust of the body and its passion."<sup>19</sup> The Church Fathers, for instance, regarded "women's reproductive organs and the process of childbirth [as] . . . especially dirty and disgusting. . . . Jerome depicted childbirth as a disgusting affair marked by unpleasantness and impurity."<sup>20</sup> Tertullian (ca. 160–226) vehemently objected to women's attractive appearance and demanded that they put on nothing but penitential garb in reflection of the sinfulness committed by the first woman, Eve. Jerome (ca. 340–420) revealed how much sexual fantasies plagued him in his desert isolation: "My face was pale and my frame chilled with fasting; yet my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust kept bubbling up before me when my flesh was as good as dead."<sup>21</sup>

St. Augustine (354–430), on the other hand, in explicit opposition to wide-spread Manichean ideology which was opposed to all sexuality in a radical rejection of everything that could destroy the power of divine light, approved of marriage as

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<sup>17</sup> Haliczzer, *Sexuality in the Confessional*, 207.

<sup>18</sup> Haliczzer, *Sexuality in the Confessional*, 208.

<sup>19</sup> Paula M. Rieder, *On the Purification of Women: Churching in Northern France, 1100–1500*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 20. See also the seminal study on this subject, Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Rieder, *On the Purification of Women*, 21. She also emphasizes: "Official teaching on sexual matters for the laity considered intercourse appropriate only between husband and wife. The social reality, however, was different. The sexual use of slave women and the ability of higher-status men to have a wife plus one or more concubines meant that unmarried mothers were not uncommon. Canon setting penances for men who violated consecrated women suggests another situation in which an unmarried woman, even a nun, might become a mother. The penitentials, which were designed above all for practical use, included the ecclesiastical ideal of intercourse between married couples but also the reality of cultic impurity posed by all mothers" (26–27).

<sup>21</sup> *Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages: A Medieval Source Documents Reader*, ed. Martha A. Brożyna (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2005), 25–27.

a safe haven for people to live out their sexual desires in an acceptable manner if the intercourse served only to beget children:

Marriage has also this good, that carnal or youthful incontinence, even if it is bad, is turned to the honorable task of begetting children, so that marital intercourse makes something good out of the evil of lust. Finally, the concupiscence of the flesh, which parental affection tempers, is repressed and becomes inflamed more modestly. For a kind of dignity prevails when, as husband and wife they unite in the marriage act, they think of themselves as mother and father.<sup>22</sup>

Further, in his treatise on *Continence*, Augustine emphasized

The body is by nature certainly opposed to the soul, but it is not alien to the nature of man. The soul is not made up of the body, but man is made up of soul and body, and surely, whom God sets free He sets free as a whole man. When, the Savior Himself assumed a whole human nature, deigning to free in us the whole that He had made. . . . [N]ot everyone who restrains something, or even one who restrains the very delights of the flesh or mind in a marvelous manner, must be said to possess that continence whose utility and beauty we have been discussing.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, in his *City of God*, Augustine offered a detailed discussion of the theological meaning of marriage, hence also of sexuality:

Since these things are so, we see that marriage, as marriage, is good, and man, be he born of marriage or of adultery, is good in so far as he is man, because, in so far as he is a man, he is the work of God; yet, because generated with and from the evil which conjugal chastity uses well, it is necessary that he be freed from the bond of this evil by regeneration. (III, 22)<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Private Life in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

Undoubtedly, people's private lives in the past carry as much weight as their public lives because both influence each other profoundly. Individual happiness resulting, for instance, from sexual fulfillment, can have a tremendous impact on political decisions, economic negotiations, religious disputes, and all kinds of other human interactions. We know that sexual performance before an athletic event is often strictly forbidden today because it negatively influences the public

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted from *Gender and Sexuality*, 32; see also *Sexuality*, ed. Robert A. Nye. Oxford Readers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), which contains text excerpts from recent relevant studies that also address the issue of sexuality in early Christianity and the Middle Ages.

<sup>23</sup> *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Clark. Selections from the Fathers of the Church, 1 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 34.

<sup>24</sup> *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, 90.

performance.<sup>25</sup> An unhappy marriage, perhaps as the result of an unsatisfactory sexual relationship, would certainly have influence on how the individual partner behaves in public, possibly leading to aggressiveness and revengefulness.

Since time immemorial marriage has regularly been regarded, at least in the Western world, as a safe haven for sexuality. Although celibacy and abstinence were considered of highest value within the Christian Church, already the apostles, foremost St. Paul among them, had realized that marriage was a necessary evil, or rather, compromise: "It is better to marry than to burn [with desire]." Further, a "husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband . . . Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control" (I Cor. 7, 9 and 3–5).<sup>26</sup>

The real question, however, is a matter of ranking these areas in terms of importance, whether the study of a battle or of a pogrom might be more important than the history of emotions among husband and wife, parents and children,

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Thomson, *Endowed: Regulating the Male Sexed Body*. Discourses of the Law (New York: Routledge, 2007). For recent, most controversial discussions pertaining to hormonal and chemical aspects regarding the question whether sexual activity before an athletic competition reduces the energy level and strength, or whether it might have the very opposite effect, see, for example, the journalistic articles that could be easily multiplied by the hundreds (and hence are not necessarily reliable or retrievable, online at: <http://misterscience.blogspot.com/2007/08/sex-before-sport.html>; <http://www.salzburg.com/sn/schwerpunkte/gesundheit/artikel/303232.html>; or <http://www.gesundheitpro.de/Sport-Stimmt-es-dass-Sex-vor-Rat-und-Hilfe-A050805ANON-D019130.html> (last accessed on March 31, 2008); see also *Sports Meets Medicine: Urologie und Sport: Lifestyle, Sexualität, Onkologie und Sport*, ed. Frank Sommer and C. Graf (Göttingen: Cuvillier, 2002). See also the contribution to this volume by Andrew Holt.

<sup>26</sup> This has been discussed many times, see, for instance, Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 138–39. For the by now rich corpus of critical studies dealing with virtually every facet of sexuality, including transgressions, deviant practices (according to contemporary heterosexual normativity), allegedly sinful behavior, and so forth, see *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1696 (New York and London: Garland, 1996). They cover, in general terms, the three major categories: 1. sexual norms; 2. variance from norms; 3. cultural issues. Within this gamut, we can find any topic of relevance both then and today, whether we turn to prostitution, abortion, contraception, castration, homosexuality, lesbianism, Jewish and Islamic concepts of sexuality, chastity, and so forth. See also *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1360 (New York and London: Garland, 1991). Here the larger issues are: 1. courtship; 2. disclosure; 3. diversity; and 4. public implications. An even wider sweep determines the collection of articles in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin. Trans. Anthony Forster. Family, Sexuality and Social Relations in Past Times (1982; Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985). Here the discussion of sexuality jumps from investigations of St. Paul's viewpoints (Ariès) to homosexuality in history (Ariès) to prostitution in fifteenth-century France (Jacques Rossiaud) and the courtesan in sixteenth-century Venice (Achillo Olivieri).

lovers, and so forth. Should we rather focus on economic and military data, and on philosophical and theological texts than on documents in which human desire for sexuality comes to the fore?<sup>27</sup> To raise this question is tantamount to denying it, as a flood of recent scholarship has amply demonstrated,<sup>28</sup> thoroughly examining issues pertaining to love, marriage, sexuality, perversion, and all kinds of transgressions.<sup>29</sup>

By now, fortunately, it amounts to carrying proverbial owls to Athens to state that the history of mentality and of everyday life is as important, if not even more so, as the history of warfare, political negotiations, the establishment of power structures, of the formation of nations, religion, the arts, and literature.<sup>30</sup> All people's actions are somehow motivated by something, so it would be foolish to ignore basic instincts, urges, needs, emotions, desires, fantasies, and the like as the basis of specific actions, attitudes, ideas, concepts, value systems, and ethical and moral norms. Even the medieval acknowledged the positive and constructive value of marriage as an institution where sexuality could be lived out.<sup>31</sup> Social and cultural historians constantly strive to probe deeper and to decipher more in depth the reasons that led to specific decisions, the underlying purposes of specific actions, and the anxieties or fears that drove individuals to display individual behavior. So it has become entirely legitimate to investigate the meaning of anger, for instance, or fear, sorrow, pain, attitudes toward old age, children, the

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<sup>27</sup> Robert M. Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1185* (Notre Dame: University of Indiana Press, 2006). Kathy M. Krause, in her review (*The Medieval Review*. 08.08.03; internet), poignantly comments: he challenges two 'classic' generic paradigms of literary history, namely: the separation of historiographical from 'fictional' narratives and the idea of a linear development from epic to romance. Although his focus is clearly political, he emphasizes that his project is not concerned with narrating 'the trajectory of political change in itself' but rather he is interested in 'the pressures on modes of representation that are correlative to changes in the structure of political power.' (2). It is this last statement that is the key to Stein's analysis.

<sup>28</sup> Philippe Brauntein, "Toward Intimacy: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Revelations of the Medieval World*, 535-630; regarding making love, marriage, care of the body, and the like, see 589-610.

<sup>29</sup> See now the excellent overview by Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), though here, as so often, the focus rests on the pragmatic, legal, social, religious, and economic aspects, not so much on the specific experience of sexuality. Cf. the detailed review by Philip Dayleader in *The Medieval Review* 07-06-16 (online at: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=tmr;cc=tmr;q1=McSheffrey;rgn=main;view=text;idno=baj9928.0706.016>).

<sup>30</sup> See the various contributions to *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelsbacher. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 469 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 68-83, et passim; Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions : Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

experience of joy and happiness, and the relationship, or lack thereof, with foreigners, minorities, and “deviant groups” (whatever that might mean).<sup>32</sup>

### 3. History of Emotions Within the Context of Sexuality

Although all emotions consist of a highly complex set of facets, making them some of the most difficult study objects, there are incredibly expressive documents available in this field, such as literary documents, musical compositions, and artistic productions.<sup>33</sup> Peter N. Stearns defines the purpose and goals of the history

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<sup>32</sup> *Emotions and Sensibilities in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Stephen Jaeger and Ingrid Kasten. Trends in Medieval Philology, 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2003); see also Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006); Albrecht Classen, “Anger and Anger Management in the Middle Ages: Mental-Historical Perspectives,” *Mediavistik* 19 (2006): 21–50; id., “Rituale des Trauerns als Sinnstiftung und ethische Transformation des eigenen Daseins im agonalen Raum der höfischen Welt. Zwei Fallstudien: *Die Klage* und *Mai und Beafloer*,” *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 36 (2006): 30–54; see also the other contributions to this volume.

<sup>33</sup> Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionality: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,” *American Historical Review* 90, 4–5 (1985): 813–36; *Kulturen der Gefühle in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Ingrid Kasten, Gesa Stedmann, and Margarete Zimmermann. Querelles, 7 (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2002). William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), examines, after a critical analysis of what emotions really mean from an anthropological and psychological perspective, the history of emotions in early modern France and beyond. Another, most intriguing, aspect would be laughter as a most powerful expression of emotions. Touched upon by many scholars, there are no good studies on this topic yet, see, for instance, the preliminary investigation by Jacques Le Goff, “Laughter in the Middle Ages,” *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge, Oxford, and Malden, MA: Polity Press and Blackwell, 1997), 40–53; *Komische Gegenwelten: Lachen und Literatur in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Helga Neumann (Paderborn, Munich, et al.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999); Klaus Grubmüller, “Wer lacht im Märe – und wozu?,” *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen von Gelächter im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten. Trends in Medieval Philology, 4 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005), 111–22, argues, curiously, that laughter indicates anarchy and chaos. Gerd Althoff, “Vom Lächeln zum Verlachen,” *ibid.*, 3–16, assumes, also highly questionably, that laughter represents a codified means of communication and would hence be the result of deliberate social-political strategies to establish ritual performance; for a contrastive perspective, see Albrecht Classen, “Der komische Held Till Eulenspiegel: Didaxe, Unterhaltung, Kritik,” *Wirkendes Wort* 42, 1 (1992): 13–33. For a more complex analysis of literary scenes where laughter erupts in Middle High German texts, see Sebastian Cox, “*do lachete die gote*: Zur literarischen Inszenierung des Lachens in der höfischen Epik,” *Wolfram-Studien XVIII. Erzähltechnik und Erzählstrategien in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters: Saarbrücker Kolloquium 2002*, ed. Wolfgang Haubrichs, Eckart Conrad Lutz, and Klaus Ridder (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2004), 189–210.

of emotions as follows: "The history of emotions deals with processes of change in emotional standards and emotional experiences, or, somewhat more complexly, with emotional continuities amid changing contexts . . . seeking to grasp the characteristic emotional styles of a particular period, in and of themselves, as a means of enriching the portrayal of that past time and launching the process of comparing one previous period to another."<sup>34</sup>

Emotions, however, have also a material base, whether in hormones or in other physiological reactions. Hence the world of sexuality also deserves to be studied closely; not surprisingly the corpus of relevant scholarship has grown in leaps and bounds for the last twenty years and more, though until today common notions about sexuality in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance seemed to highlight the negative, as if the Catholic Church dominated every aspect of human life and was highly intolerant of any sexual act that did not intend to conceive a child.<sup>35</sup> The opposite extreme of this stereotype can also be observed, reflected in studies or anthologies of primary texts from that time, arguing that it was a time of utmost lustfulness, moral depravity, and individual freedom, as perhaps best expressed by Carl Orff's modern version of the medieval *Carmina Burana* (first performed in Frankfurt a. M. in 1937).<sup>36</sup>

If we consider the tremendous, far-reaching influence of sexuality on almost every aspect of modern culture, and then trace the history of this influence further back, such as to the Middle Ages and antiquity, we would have to realize that there has hardly ever been any other inner force in human life that impacted culture, religion, politics, and economy more—we would, however, also have to acknowledge that all these areas of human activities have had a constant and far-

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<sup>34</sup> Peter N. Stearns, "History of Emotions: Issues of Change and Impact," *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis and Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones. 2nd ed. (1993; New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2000), 16–29; here 16.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*. Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Sander L. Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History. Representing the Sexual in Medicine and Culture from the Middle Ages to the Age of AIDS* (New York: Wiley, 1989); Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*. Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendship: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*. Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); see also the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990), and ever since; Alejandra Faúndez Meléndez and Francisca Sotomayor, *Historia de la sexualidad: una aproximación histórica* ([Santiago:] Colectivo El Telar, 1993); Wolfgang Ertler, *Im Rausch der Sinnlichkeit: die Geschichte der unterdrückten Lust und die Vision einer paradiesischen Sexualität* (Kreuzlingen: H. Hugendubel, 2001); see also the older, but still valuable study by Carl van Bolen, *Geschichte der Erotik: Das grosse Standardwerk über die Sexualität und Erotik in der Menschengeschichte*. 3rd ed. Das Heyne-Sachbuch, 64 (1966; Munich: H. Heyne, 1967); see also Jean-Pierre Poly, *Le chemin des amours barbares: g enèse médiévale de la sexualité européenne* (Paris: Perrin, 2003); Fabienne Casta-Rosaz, *Histoire de la sexualité en occident* (Paris: Edition de la Martinière, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.inkpot.com/classical/carminaburana.html> (last accessed on March 31, 2008).

reaching impact on the way that sexuality was viewed and dealt with throughout times.<sup>37</sup> Although sometimes the sources do not flow richly enough to make a solid case, even the public discourse during the Anglo-Saxon times reflects definite elements pertaining to sex and sexuality.<sup>38</sup> Not surprisingly, the Catholic Church, as well as most other religious groups and institutions then and afterwards as well, harshly attacked the lustful experience of sexuality and combated this human experience as most sinful and hence condemnable in the theological context, meaning that it had to be suppressed at almost any cost.<sup>39</sup>

The issue today, however, in light of long-term research efforts reaching as far back as to the early twentieth-century when *Sittengeschichte* (the history of morality) dominated the public and scholarly discourse, or to the 1970s and 80s, when medievalists and Renaissance scholars, among others, influenced the field, is no longer whether Freudian principles can be adduced for the examination of sexual practices, social responses, and clerical reactions. More important, we are called upon now to analyze the function which sexuality assumed in the past in light of new insights produced by mental history (*histoire de mentalité*, *Mentalitätsgeschichte*) and social approaches to medieval and early-modern history, as outlined, paradigmatically, by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality*.<sup>40</sup> In

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<sup>37</sup> For the issue of sexuality in antiquity, see Werner Krenkel, *Naturalia non turpia: Schriften zur antiken Kultur- und Sexualwissenschaft*, ed. Wolfgang Bernard and Christiane Reitz (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2006); John G. Younger, *Sex in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gilmore Calder*, ed. Carol Braun Pasternack and Lisa M. C. Weston. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 277 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Peter Dinzelsbacher, "Sexualität/Liebe: Mittelalter," *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte*, 70–89. His concept of sexuality in the Middle Ages is deeply influenced by the numerous testimonies produced by members of the Church, whereas vernacular, but to some extent also Latin literature, especially from the late Middle Ages, speaks a somewhat different language. See also his discussion of love arrows that could cause great fear and served, in their metaphorical function, to intensify the religious operation against the lustful experience of sexuality, replacing it with a spiritual form of love: *Angst im Mittelalter: Teufels-, Todes- und Gotteserscheinung: Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonographie* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna and Zurich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1996), 216–24.

<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de Sexualité*. 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976–1984), basically argued against the Freudian and Marxist reading of sexuality, opposing their theory of repression and essentialism, suggesting, instead, to grasp sexuality as a medium of discourse, and as mode of power. See the comprehensive analysis by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, "Introduction," *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, ed. eadem (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), ix–xx; and: *Feminism and the Final Foucault*, ed. Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). See also the excellent critical summary of current research trends regarding the history of sexuality by Franz X. Eder, "'Sexualunterdrückung' oder 'Sexualisierung'? Zu den theoretischen Ansätzen der 'Sexualitätsgeschichte'," *Privatisierung der Triebe?: Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vöclka. Frühneuzeit-Studien, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1994), 7–29. Despite the



addition, the history of sexuality requires, because of its enormous cultural-historical complexity, an interdisciplinary approach, inviting historians and art historians, literary scholars and sociologists, anthropologists and theologians to the same table.<sup>41</sup> This becomes particularly evident in light of Foucault's argument that sexuality is "a historically constituted discourse characteristic of a particular social formation."<sup>42</sup> However, this should not mislead us to assume that medieval and early-modern approaches to sexuality are to be evaluated as expressions merely of individualistic history depending on who is speaking the loudest and with the most authority. Sexuality proves to be a phenomenon with a double lens into the past, insofar as it proves to be a reflection of very personal choices and also an indication of the guidelines and principles instituted by the various authorities.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4. Some Reflections on the Terminology

Before we proceed further, let us consider briefly how we might have to define sexuality in the Middle Ages and in the early modern age, if that might be possible at all. Ruth Mazo Karras offers the preliminary formulation: "'Sexuality' refers to the set of meanings a given culture constructs around sexual behavior . . . medieval schemes put more emphasis on whether one played an active or passive role than on who one's partner was." She continues, refining the research area pertaining to the phenomenon of sexuality: "The history of sexuality is a history of attitudes or ways of thinking and feeling rather than a history of who did what to whom . . . ; there is no such thing as 'the medieval attitude' toward sex. . . . Different kinds of writing, written for different purposes, express different ideas about sexuality."<sup>44</sup> Peter Dinzelsbacher emphasizes that in medieval Latin sexuality was translated as *luxuria* and sexual intercourse as *fornicatio*. Citing from the *Liber de modo bene vivendi*, he determines that for medieval clerics, some of the most powerful, though many times also rather dubious authorities of sexuality, fornication represents the worst enemy of God because it sullies not only the body, but also the consciousness, that is, the soul.<sup>45</sup>

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title, the volume contains a number of highly relevant studies pertaining to sexuality in the Middle Ages.

<sup>41</sup> Franz X. Eder, *Kultur der Begierde: Eine Geschichte der Sexualität* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 7–27.

<sup>42</sup> Carlos Salazar, *Anthropology and Sexual Morality: A Theoretical Investigation* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 33.

<sup>43</sup> Tina Chanter, *Gender: Key Concepts in Philosophy* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), 56–68.

<sup>44</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, "Sexuality," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages: Supplement*, 1, ed. William Chester Jordan (New York, Detroit, et al.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004), 569–77; here 569.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Europa im Hochmittelalter 1050–1250: Eine Kultur- und Mentalitätsgeschichte*.

Globally, the Catholic Church has consistently battled against concupiscence and sexuality until today, imposing feelings of guilt on those who enjoyed sexual relationships and experiences for their own sake. At the same time, it would be erroneous to assume that “Christian sexual ethics have been . . . uniform [ ] or static. Instead, Christian views of sex have changed over time as the Church has adapted itself to changes in society.”<sup>46</sup>

The term ‘sexuality’ was unknown in the Middle Ages, since ‘sexus’ pertained to the sexual identity of each person (male, female, or something else, as we would add today). Whereas chastity was regarded by the Catholic Church as one of the highest ideals, the pervasive and ever-present power of sexuality could not be denied and was simply explained as a consequence of Adam’s and Eve’s transgression and subsequent expulsion from Paradise. However, sex, as the concrete act, was of course accepted as part of conjugal life, and was actually treated as a necessity, if practiced according to very limiting rules and regulations gradually imposed on secular society by canon law throughout the Middle Ages. The fourth, and last, stage of love has systematically found different terminology: “medical and scientific writers described [it] as coitus, preachers as fornication, poets as de-flowering, ordinary folk as fucking, and the more prudish with the Latin euphemism *factum* – or “doing it.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, sexuality was regarded as a “remedium concupiscentiae” and defined as an obligation. Impotence, for instance, could justify divorce, and this even in the Middle Ages.<sup>48</sup>

“Luxuria,” the term for illicit sex, comprised “fornicatio simplex,” or the visit of a brothel; “adulterium,” or adultery; “incestus,” or incest; and “peccatum contra naturam,” or sin against nature. Thomas Aquinas was one of the many high medieval theologians to discuss sexual transgressions, comprising “mollities” (masturbation); “bestialitas” (bestiality); “vitium sodomiticum” (homosexuality); and “concubitus non debitus” (improper forms of sexual conduct, such as anal or dorsal sex). Moreover, most theologians sharply condemned all forms of sexual practices that aimed to avoid pregnancy, such as “coitus interruptus.”<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, despite all their chastisement, criticism, condemnation, and warnings, both incest and ‘perverse’ forms of sexuality happened all the time, and poets throughout the Middle Ages and far beyond have dealt with these themes both explicitly and implicitly<sup>50</sup>—with the proviso, of course, that the idea of

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Kultur und Mentalität (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2003), 127.

<sup>46</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (London: Calmann & King, 1998), 121.

<sup>48</sup> Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, “Sexualität,” *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, VII (Munich: LexMA Verlag, 1995), 1812–83.

<sup>50</sup> See the contribution to: *Sexuelle Perversionen im Mittelalter*, ed. Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang

'perversion' depends on the strategy "to pathologize particular sexual practices and the identities . . . associated with them."<sup>51</sup>

Not surprisingly, many of these aspects had originally been discussed by the Church Fathers, foremost among them St. Augustine, but already before them the Gnostics, under the leadership of Julius Cassianus, had ardently argued that men basically turned into beasts if they copulated, or practiced sexuality in any form.<sup>52</sup>

Curiously, the Eastern Church had accepted sexual intercourse as not sinful within marriage even when practiced without the explicit purpose to create children, since the latter only required God's words. Saint John Chrysostom (d. 407), by contrast, harbored a more tolerant attitude about marital sex, but severely warned about the potential dangers resulting from homosexual contacts.

The famous *Corpus Iuris Civilis* identified homosexuality as equally condemnable as adultery, that is, to be punished with the death penalty, a tenor that was to reverberate throughout the next thousand years, or so. The seventh-century medical writer Paulus Agineta advised his readers to enjoy coitus as an excellent remedy against melancholy. But in the Germanic areas the missionaries, and subsequent to them, Christian theologians and lawmakers throughout the Middle Ages had to confront the conflict between traditional Germanic law and Church law. As Vern L. Bullough advances, "Ultimately the Church was able to assert its own control over family faith and morals, but it had to do so with an educational campaign based on fear, partly upon teachings."<sup>53</sup>

The Italian Benedictine Peter Damian (1007–1072), a famous reformer of the Church, published some of the most vehement condemnations of all forms of sex that were not directly intended for procreation within the framework of marriage, casting them as 'sins against nature': "Four types of this form of criminal wickedness can be distinguished in an effort to show you the totality of the whole matter in an orderly way: some sin with themselves alone; some commit mutual masturbation; some commit femoral fornication; and finally, others commit the complete act against nature."<sup>54</sup> The more we study medieval canon law, hence law

Spiewok. XXIX. Jahrestagung des Arbeitskreises "Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters." Wodan, 46. Tagungsbände und Sammelchriften, 3. Actes de Collques et Ouvrages Collectifs, 26 (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1994).

<sup>51</sup> James Penney, *The World of Perversion: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Absolute of Desire*. SUNY Series in Psychoanalysis and Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 173.

<sup>52</sup> Vern L. Bullough, "Introduction: The Christian Inheritance," *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church*, ed. id. and James Brundage (Buffalo and New York: Prometheus Books, 1982), 6–7.

<sup>53</sup> Vern L. Bullough, "Formation of Medieval Ideals: Christian Theory and Christian Practice," *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church*, 14–21; here 21.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Damian, *Book of Gomorrah: An Eleventh-Century Treatise against Clerical Homosexual Practices*. Trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Pierre J. Payer (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 29. He explains the phenomenon itself with a reference to the devil and its evil influence, 60: "When a male rushes to a male to commit impurity, this is not the

directly addressing sexual practices, the more we also have to realize how intensively the authors of the various penitentials throughout the centuries were concerned with such “vices” and tried to eradicate them both among the clergy and the laity. If we were to believe the penitential literature as a benchmark, masturbation, bestiality, sodomy, and lesbianism seem to have been astonishingly common. The authors of the penitentials basically worked as law-makers, and we should not naively assume that they were anything but hysterical, or extremely sensitive to any potential form of sexual deviation. On the contrary, we can safely claim that already the early Christian Church regularly had to deal with a plethora of sexual practices, interests, tendencies, preferences, and orientations.<sup>55</sup>

Ordinary people, including the nobility, embraced sexuality quite differently than the Church authorities, and so did lawyers, artists, philosophers, and theologians, each group pursuing different interests in the critical examination of this phenomenon which is so fundamental in the life of almost every adult. From the beginning of all human life, sex provides identity and marks the person in his/her unique bodily make-up, which might explain the difficult nature of transsexuality, same-sex orientation (in the Middle Ages commonly called ‘sodomy’),<sup>56</sup> and many other types of sexual transgression. Sex involves potential fertility, and so sexuality would be the larger platform for the physical interaction between two adult individuals. This, in turn, leads to global explorations of identity, ethical and moral norms, religious ideals, and the communicative exchanges among people.

Curiously, but perhaps not quite surprisingly, although the annals from the Middle Ages and the early modern age are filled with statements and comments about sexuality, virtually any attempt to come to terms with ‘sexuality’ has regularly proven to be—no pun intended—most slippery and fractured by the problematic nature of the human language in face of a mysterious experience. The more church laws and secular laws were issued to direct, control, channel, and determine the way how sexuality was practiced, the more the individual seems to have found ways to subterfuge those attempts; otherwise the penitential books would not have become increasingly detailed regarding the various types of alleged sexual misconduct.

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natural impulse of the flesh, but only the goad of diabolical impulse.”

<sup>55</sup> Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, 40–54, for the early Church. He offers the significant and far reaching methodological observation, 120: “The most rational methodological position would seem to be that the specific sexual content of the penitentials is a reflection of actual behaviour on a scale to warrant inclusion. . . . It is worth recalling that one of the specific questions asked of Hrabanus Maurus concerned those who have sexual relations with female dogs and cows. It is unlikely that such a question was prompted by abstract legal concern.”

<sup>56</sup> Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Sodom and Gomorrah: on the Everyday Reality and Persecution of Homosexuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. John Phillips (1998 ; London and New York: Free Association Books, 2001).

Moreover, sexuality carries a myriad of meanings and applications, whether we think of the physical or the metaphysical, the sacred or the profane. The discourse of sexuality, pursued ever since human records have been available, reflects the highly amorphous, potentially harmful, but also exhilarating and transforming, spiritual, mysterious, and physical nature of sexuality. No wonder that practically every philosopher, theologian, poet, and artist has plunged into this debate, both in the Middle Ages and far beyond. The problem consists, of course, of the ephemeral nature of the sexual experience. "Happening in time," as Michael Camille observes, "its instinctual responses and sensations cannot be registered in the still medium of the image, which places us always on the outside of the act, as voyeurs . . . This is the paradox at the heart of the medieval art of love; that its longed-for goal can so easily seem banal, even ridiculous. Sex is layered with symbols in order not so much to conceal its physical nature but rather to give it some semblance of meaning."<sup>57</sup>

## 5. History of Sexuality and Love

We have determined for a long time that courtly love was one of the most important factors in the history of the Middle Ages at least since ca. 1100 for determining the course of social and cultural progress. In other words, the world of the high medieval courts would be an entirely different entity without the element of courtly love.<sup>58</sup> But it could not have been only a fictionalized concept, or an esoteric replacement of the physical attractions between the genders (whether hetero- or homosexual) within the literary discourse. As James A. Schultz poignantly emphasizes, perhaps even with a bit of irony, "That children were born in the Middle Ages does suggest that medieval women and men had sex with each other."<sup>59</sup> The issue, however, would not be whether people engaged in sexual relationships—they certainly did, otherwise we would not be here today—but how the various groups within medieval society, such as the Church, the court, the nobility, the universities, etc., evaluated sexuality, whether the topic of sexuality was tabooed, negatively connoted, or silenced.

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 122.

<sup>58</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 159, emphasizes with regard to sexuality: "But what would be the source of honor? Its source for ennobling love had been precisely the sovereign managing of sexuality. That had shown strength, given innocence, allure, freedom of erotic gesture and expression, and granted the ability to confer aura."

<sup>59</sup> James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 53.

Although there is no doubt that the Catholic Church held a highly negative viewpoint of sexuality, condemning its enjoyment outright and accepting it only as a necessary evil for the survival of mankind,<sup>60</sup> curiously, more often than commonly assumed, countless capitals and corbels in Romanic and also Gothic churches all over Europe exhibit gross-looking, if not obscene, figures, openly displaying their genitals and presenting all kinds of sexual acts. Some scholars have assumed that here we deal with ancient vestiges of fertility rites, or ancient power, but since these carvings were attached to Christian churches, it would seem rather likely, as Anthony Weir and James Jerman have suggested, “that sheela-na-gigs and allied exhibitionists are arguably iconographic images whose purpose was to give visual support to the Church’s moral teachings. They reflect, albeit in a small way, the subjects depicted on tympana, capitals, friezes and panels—the great dooms and visions of judgment.”<sup>61</sup> The two schools of thought regarding the sheelas’ meaning either refer to ancient Celtic fertility rites, or to twelfth-century Christian misogyny and dramatic fear of female sexuality.<sup>62</sup> It

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<sup>60</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, *Europa im Hochmittelalter*, 127–31. He points out a curious discrepancy between the numerous, probably apotropaic, representations of genitals and sexual practices on the one hand, and the prudishness of a vast number of contemporary texts and illustrations where the actual sexual act is normally left out (here 128). For a comprehensive survey of the relevant laws regarding sinful sexual acts, whether in marriage or outside, see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. He offers an excellent graphic chart on p. 162; a scanned-in copy of which can now also be found on my homepage, see: <http://www.gened.arizona.edu/aclassen/Classen.pdf> (last accessed on March 31, 2008). See also Classen’s contribution to this volume, “Sexual Desire and Pornography.”

<sup>61</sup> Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), 10. In the conclusion they reconfirm their far-reaching finding: “We have not found the slightest suspicion that there entered into any of these works an element of fertility worship—unless the foliage-spewers are construed as showing life springing forth from dead skulls—or any sign of apotropaic magic” (150). See also the study by Jack Roberts, “Sheela-na-gigs,” <http://www.whitedragon.org.uk/articles/sheela.htm>; see further the website by Jill Schubert, “Sheela Na Gigs of Ireland and England” (2006) at: <http://jlschubert.tripod.com/index.htm> (both last accessed on March 31, 2008). Eamonn Kelly, “Irish Sheela-na-gigs and Related Figures with Reference to the Collections of the National Museum of Ireland,” *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola F. McDonald (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press; Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 124–37; here 137, reaches only the conclusion that the Sheelas represent “figures [of] . . . a complex matter and, perhaps most importantly, their significance and function appear to have changed across space and time.”

<sup>62</sup> Juliette Dor, “The Sheela-na-Gig: An Incongruous Sign of Sexual Purity?,” *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 33–55; here 49, convincingly suggests that these figures would have to be read as deliberately ambiguous and polysemantic: “The polysemous gaze of the sheela-na-gigs did not only perform a dangerous female sexuality in order to frighten women and to fascinate the eyes of the misogynistic clerks of a male-dominated society. It also reactivated a hoard of Celtic myths that portrayed a different view of womanhood and knew that ‘femininity’ covered and fused all its facets of womanhood; the ugly hag and the beautiful maiden, the mother and the virgin.” See also the contribution to this volume by Christina Weising.

remains a profound challenge to come to terms with this deliberate exposure of the vulva, technically identified as *anasyrma*, in an effort to frighten away men folks, or perhaps the devil. The latter is indirectly testified even by an episode in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (third century) where St. Thecla of Iconium saves herself from a wild lion who is supposed to devour her in the Coliseum as punishment for her religious devotion to Christ by exposing her vulva.<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, whether apotropaic or playful, whether religious-moral or artistic, whether serving to warn the viewer of the basic human sins,<sup>64</sup> or of the omnipresent demonic and devilish,<sup>65</sup> not to disregard the association of these sexual images with the enemies of the Church, especially the Saracens, the human body in all of its functions, both concerning relieving oneself of urine and feces, and concerning the sexual act, was openly a topic of public discourse, involving representatives of all intellectual groups, and this both in the Middle Ages and far into modern times.<sup>66</sup>

Numerous documents written by theologians, philosophers, and others address allegedly contemptuous, morally debased behavior by certain individuals and groups, often leading to the charge of obscenity, inhibition, sodomy, sexual contacts with the devil or an incubus, and even orgies as proxy religious ceremonies, especially carried out by heretics, such as the Cathars. We find an intriguing example in Bishop Liudprand of Cremona's *Retribution* (or *Antapodosis*) (ca. 962) where he heaps piles of accusations on various members of the high-ranking Italian nobility, both men and women, for their sexual transgression: "once Adalbert, margrave of the city if Ivrea, was dead, his wife Ermengard . . . obtained primacy in all Italy. The cause of her power was this: that—and it is most hideous even to say it—she exercised carnal transactions with one and all, not just princes, but even with ordinary men."<sup>67</sup> Perhaps a little less acrimoniously, yet still

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<sup>63</sup> Ewald Kislinger, "Anasyrma: Notizen zur Geste des Schamwesens," *Symbole des Alltags, Alltag der Symbole: Festschrift für Harry Kühnel zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Gertrud Blaschitz, Helmut Hundsbichler, Gerhard Jaritz, and Elisabeth Vavra (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1992), 377-94; see also Malcolm Jones, "Sex and Sexuality in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art," *Privatisierung der Triebe*, 187-304.

<sup>64</sup> Weir and Jerman, *Images of Lust*, 15-17.

<sup>65</sup> Kislinger, "Anasyrma," 391. See also the corresponding reflections upon the iconographic motif of men revealing their intimate parts, as discussed by Gerhard Jaritz, "Die Bruoch," *Symbole des Alltags*, 395-416.

<sup>66</sup> *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola F. McDonald, 2006; see also Valerie Allen, *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For sheela-na-gigs, see also Malcolm Jones, "Sheela-na-Gig," *Medieval Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs*, ed. Carl Lindahl, John McNamara, and John Lindow (Santa Barbara, CA, Denver, and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 912-14; Carol Lee Rose, "The Evolution of the Enigmatic Sheela-Na-Gig . . ." M.A. Thesis, Texas Woman's University, 2006.

<sup>67</sup> *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. with an introd. and notes by Paolo Squatriti.

in most condemning terms, he attacked King Hugh for his sexual depravity: "who, even if he shone with virtues, besmirched them through his passion for women" (III, 19; p. 118). Deliberately trying to meddle in the dynastic politics of Italy, he happily slandered notorious women as prostitutes (III, 43; p. 133).

For propaganda purposes even the Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250) and the entire Order of the Templars were accused of sexual deviations and pornography, and the entire monastic order of Franciscans occasionally faced similar charges.<sup>68</sup> Could we even dare to draw a demarcation line as to when this uninhibited attitude toward the body actually underwent a profound transformation? A most unusual object often included in *Anna Selbdritt* (St. Anne together with the Virgin Mary and the Christ child) figures, sculptures, and paintings could lead the way toward a much more complex understanding of the epistemological function of sexuality as a topic of discourse. In the late Middle Ages many times artists included a pomegranate which the Virgin Mary holds out to the Christ child, right above St. Anna's womb, the peel partly opened, easily evoking the image of the vulva,<sup>69</sup> which finds surprising parallels in a number of paintings created by the Benedictine nuns in St. Walburg, Eichstätt (Germany) around 1500. The erotic imagery of the penetration of Christ's body through the lance wound on his right chest was not, of course, pornographic in intention, entirely the opposite. Nevertheless we cannot deny or ignore the curious parallels between both levels of meaning conveyed by this image. Though Jeffrey F. Hamburger cautions us not to impose an anachronistic reading, he still emphasizes the epistemological analogies: "Where we are inclined to read the opening in Christ's side as a fetish or an objectification of the body, nuns regarded it as an invitation to introspection, a literal looking inward. They lined the wound to the portal or entrance leading toward the womblike interior of his heart."<sup>70</sup>

This might help us to understand the meaning of numerous late-medieval mock pilgrimage images made out of metal found in Holland, in which a vulva carries a penis on its top, holding a pilgrimage staff in its right hand and a rosary in its left.<sup>71</sup> A surprisingly large number of metallic phallus figures from the Netherlands, either in combination with animal features, with people, or by

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Medieval Texts in Translation (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), III, 7; p. 114.

<sup>68</sup> Ernst Englisch, "Die Beurteilung sexueller Verhaltensweisen im Mittelalter," *Privatisierung der Triebe? Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. Frühneuzeit-Studien, 1 (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 171–76.

<sup>69</sup> Virginia Nixon, *Mary's Mother: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Europe* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 156–57.

<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997), 219.

<sup>71</sup> Nixon, *Mary's Mother*, 156 and 158; see also Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "The Visual and the Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions," *Viator* 20 (1989): 161–82, fig. 23.



themselves, but combined with wings, or with travel objects, such as ships, or serving in place of horses to transport a person, then also vulvae, either alone, or attached, combined, or imposed on other objects, animals, or people, all from the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, indicate how much the discourse of sexuality permeated all kinds of social levels and classes. Modern collectors and museum directors mostly kept these objects secret, but we can no longer deny their existence, though we are far away from fully grasping their significance and purpose.<sup>72</sup>

They were probably apotropaic in their primary function, but they certainly turned into hilarious objects not only intended to fend off the "Evil Eye," but also to transgress simple taboos, to present the human body in a topsy-turvy condition, focusing only on the anthropomorphized genitals, and to satirize, surprisingly, political and religious opponents, or simply the pilgrims themselves, though it seems rather far-fetched, following Malcolm Jones's argument, to assume that the pilgrims were willing to poke fun at themselves wearing these badges.<sup>73</sup> Johan H. Winkelman now suggests that this open display of female genitals in mostly bizarre oversize served as protective instruments against the seductive force of female sexuality or, in cases of grotesque phalli, as visual objects to exhibit exorbitant sexual virility.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the basically pornographic-like objects all over late-medieval Europe—we can even find relevant figures underneath some *misericords* in the choir stalls in medieval cathedrals<sup>75</sup>—additionally seem to have helped the wearer or user to come to terms with the normally hidden features of sexuality by way of humor. As Malcolm Jones suggests: "As with the mysteries of love, the mysteries of sexuality possibly touch us too closely, and are perhaps too important to us, for us ever to feel entirely at ease in considering them, and so, like our forebears, we escape into humour."<sup>76</sup>

But the often highly graphic, if not grotesque depiction of sexual acts and sexual organs in objects and images, not to speak of the wide gamut of literary texts (see

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<sup>72</sup> *Heilig en Profaan: 1000 Laatmiddeleeuwse Insignes uit de collectie H. J. E. van Beuningen*, ed. H. J. E. van Beuningen and A. M. Koldewey. Rotterdam Papers VIII. A Contribution to Medieval Archeology (Cothen: Stichting Middeleeuwse Religieuze en Profane Insignes, 1993), 258–64; see also the catalogue to the exhibition, *Stadtluft, Hirsebrei und Bettelmönch: die Stadt um 1300*, ed. Marianne Flüeler-Grauwerler and Niklaus Flüeler (Zürich and Stuttgart: K. Theiss, 1992), especially 434–35.

<sup>73</sup> Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger, 2003), 248–273; see also his "Sex and Sexuality in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art," 195.

<sup>74</sup> Johann H. Winkelman, "Mittelniederländische Tragezeichen und die nordwesteuropäische Kulturlandschaft. Zum kulturellen Transfer im Spätmittelalter," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 63 (2007): 199–219; here 203–07.

<sup>75</sup> Gisbert Porsmann, "Misericordien: Zwischen sexueller Versuchung und Askese," *Eros – Macht – Askese: Geschlechterspannungen als Dialogstruktur in Kunst und Literatur*, ed. Helga Scieurie and Hans-Jürgen Bachorski. Literatur – Imagination – Realität, 14 (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1996), 93–103.

<sup>76</sup> Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, 273.

below), indicate that further levels of meaning can be detected, often closely associated with epistemological efforts to come to terms with the complexities of human life, including the gender relationship, and hence with the eternal force of sexuality. Nevertheless, these “obscene” objects continue to escape our interpretive grip because we have no clear lexicon for them since obscenity itself “is solely the product of definition, of the shared language (verbal, visual and sonic) of its representation.”<sup>77</sup> However, the simple existence of those pilgrim badges demonstrates how little we really know of the Middle Ages and the allegedly total predominance of the Christian Church with its sets of rules and regulations, norms and values. Both the sexual and the obscene defy authority, hegemony, and dominance in culture and religion. In this sense I can fully concur with Nicola McDonald that “Definitions of the obscene are located at the juncture of what one group—usually the current dominant group—identifies, at a given moment, as decent and indecent.”<sup>78</sup>

Ruth Mazo Karras has recently argued that to study medieval sexuality implies to study what one person did to another, as if it had been merely a mechanical procedure that needs to be viewed from a gender perspective, above all.<sup>79</sup> Further differentiation and a deepening of our understanding of the discourse of sexuality seem to be warranted, as the many contributions to this volume will demonstrate. The purpose, however, cannot be to feed a base, prurient imagination of the modern scholar and reader, or to isolate one strain of the public discourse in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance for modern entertainment. On the contrary, to determine the key issues in a discourse both in the past and the present allows us to grasp the fundamental epistemological categories that determine the critical elements that constitute a culture and a society at large. Simply put, we could say: show me what people in the past thought and said about sexuality, and I am going to tell you who they were. Moreover, this kind of investigation will lead us into a full examination of our own tradition vis-à-vis the erotic and the sexual.

## 6. Erotic Imagination

Let’s face it, all artistic and literary enterprises have always been somehow the outcome of human imagination, and each imagination lends itself to the erotic mind, probably the most powerful engine in human existence. After all, the erotic

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<sup>77</sup> Nicola McDonald, “Introduction,” *Medieval Obscenities*, 1–16; here 11.

<sup>78</sup> Nicola McDonald, “Introduction,” 12.

<sup>79</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 3: “Medieval people, for the most part, understood sex acts as something that someone did to someone else.”

gaze always translates external objects into an imagined object, which in turn triggers a chain reaction of feelings, whether sexual or spiritual, whether we think in this context of raw Old French (Occitan) *fabliaux* and late-medieval German *mæren*. The translation process of 'desire into art/literature' has always been at work.<sup>80</sup>

In fact, medieval art, despite its strongly religious nature and properties, reveals countless erotic elements, both in the center and on the margins, sometimes subtle, and sometimes rather grotesque and deft, carelessly transgressing all kinds of moral and ethical norms and taboos.<sup>81</sup> As recent scholarship has amply demonstrated, medieval mentality was considerably more concerned with the body and its implications for the spiritual well-being than modern culture, although it would be rather difficult to determine the exact demarcation line in historical terms.<sup>82</sup> In fact, any careful analysis of some of the larger collections of verse and prose narratives composed by any of the numerous fourteenth- through seventeenth-centuries composers and/or collectors would easily yield countless examples of drastic accounts that focus on the body, its various functions, and especially, if not predominantly, on its sexual organs. Practically every European language has produced remarkable representatives, and despite the major themes of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter Reformation, erotic and even pornographic literature experienced its heyday and also met with considerable approval by the contemporary audiences.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Although I have some reservations regarding the theoretical thrust underpinning the individual contributions, see *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Craig A. Berry and Heather Richardson Hayton. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 294 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005). For a much more poignant examination of 'desire' in a postmodern fashion, see Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*. Gender, Culture, Difference (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 95–116.

<sup>81</sup> Eduard Fuchs, *Geschichte der erotischen Kunst: Das zeitgeschichtliche Problem*. Geschichte der erotischen Kunst in Einzeldarstellungen, 1 (Munich: Albert Langen, 1922), 158–76.

<sup>82</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity: 200–1336*. Lectures on the History of Religion, New Series, 15 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); see also her collection of essays, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York and Cambridge, MA: Zone Books and MIT Press, 1991); Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, "Introduction," *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. ead. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 1–9; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Körper und Frömmigkeit in der mittelalterlichen Mentalitätsgeschichte* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, and Zurich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> For the German context, see, for example, *Erotic Tales from Medieval Germany*: Selected and Translated by Albrecht Classen (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007); the relevant secondary literature regarding the genre of the *mære* can be found there. For a pan-European selection, see Robert J. Clements and Joseph Gibaldi. *Anatomy of the Novella: The European Tale Collection from Boccaccio and Chaucer to Cervantes* (New York: New York University Press, 1977); see also Ursula Peters, *Literatur in der Stadt: Studien zu den sozialen Voraussetzungen und kulturellen Organisationsformen städtischer Literatur im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert*. Studien und

Interestingly, we are not dealing with marginal, commonly ostracized literature. Geoffrey Chaucer, for instance, has his Wife of Bath say in the prologue to her *Tale*:

Telle me also, to what conclusion  
 Were membres maad of generacion,  
 And of so parfit wys a wight ywroght?  
 Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.  
 Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and doun,  
 That they were maked for purgacioun  
 Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale  
 Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,  
 And for noon oother cause,—say y no?  
 The experience woot wel it is noght so.  
 So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,  
 I sey this, that they maked ben for bothe,  
 This is to seye, for office, and for ese  
 Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese,  
 Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette  
 That man shal yelde to his wyf hir dette?  
 Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,  
 If he ne used his sely instrument?  
 Thanne were they maad upon a creature  
 To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure.<sup>84</sup>

We would, however, commit a fallacy by identifying this kind of sexual discourse with obscenity or pornography. On the contrary, quite apart from the inability to apply these modern terms anachronistically to the Middle Ages, the topic of sexuality centrally contributed to the discourse on the gender relationship, love, and marriage. The comic element was, of course, irrepressible, not to mention the

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Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur, 7 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983); Victor Millet, "Märe mit Moral? Zum Verhältnis von weltlichem Sinnangebot und geistlicher Moralisierung in drei mittelhochdeutschen Kurzerzählungen," *Geistliches in weltlicher und Weltliches in geistlicher Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Christoph Huber, Burghart Wachinger, and Hans-Joachim Ziegeler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 273–90; for an interdisciplinary text selection, see *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. 5th rev. ed. (1994; New York: Thomson Custom Publishing, 2004).

<sup>84</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 115–33; I have discussed this open discussion of sexuality already in *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum frühen 17. Jahrhundert*. *Volksliedstudien*, 5 (Münster, New York, et al.: Waxmann, 2005), 73–107; the current scholarship on Chaucer's *Wife of Bath Prologue* and *Tale* is, of course, legion, see also S. H. Rigby, *Chaucer in Context*. Manchester Medieval Studies (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 137–51; Peter G. Beidler, *Geoffrey Chaucer: The Wife of Bath*. Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996). See also *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown. Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

need to entertain and to offer moral and ethical instructions at the same time.<sup>85</sup> In fact, despite the dominantly religious discourse, deeply impacted by the profound conflicts between the Catholics and the Protestants, popular culture with its great interest in secular themes, including sexuality as well, continued unabatedly, and actually expanded considerably.<sup>86</sup> Whereas the growing hysteria over witchcraft and the subsequent witch craze also focused on devious practices of sexuality, especially sex with the devil as the worst transgression,<sup>87</sup> the urban and courtly public turned their attention also to erotic topics and continued, without any hesitation, with the same erotic topics as those that had already been developed in most dramatic fashion by high-medieval Latin poets.

A comparison between the *Carmina Burana* (early thirteenth century), for example, and Georg Forster's sixteenth's songbooks (1539–1556) would yield remarkable parallels, especially in the following areas: gender relationships, sexuality, drinking, and love. Apparently, the history of song poetry did not experience many changes and has continued with the same traditions from the Middle Ages to the modern age, spending surprisingly much attention to matters of sexuality, eroticism, and love.<sup>88</sup> The entire history of the dawn-songs, certainly far into the seventeenth century, basically the only lyrical genre in which lovers actually meet and spend time together, before the man has to depart the next morning, is predicated on the notion that sexuality was a most desirable human experience, though outsiders, especially the authorities, tended to oppose it for a variety of reasons.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Elisabeth Wåghäll Nivre, *Women and Family Life in Early Modern German Literature*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester, NY, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 8–9, 29, 31–32, 43–44, 51–53, et passim. For a variety of viewpoints, aiming toward the same direction, see *The Making of the Couple: The Social Function of Short-Form Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. Flemming G. Andersen and Morten Nøjgaard (Odense: Odense University Press, 1991); cf. Wolfgang Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität: Eine literaturpsychologische Studie über epische Dichtungen des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1990).

<sup>86</sup> In this regard, historians of the Reformation do us a considerable disservice by excluding the everyday experiences, mental-historical aspects, the history of private life, hence the world of sexuality; see, for example, *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); and *A Companion to the Reformation World*, ed. R. Po-chia Hsia (Malden, MA, Oxford, and Carlton, Victoria, Australia: Blackwell, 2004/2006).

<sup>87</sup> Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 82–103, underscores the great fear, prevalent at that time, regarding the loss of fertility, or childlessness.

<sup>88</sup> Albrecht Classen, *Deutsche Liederbücher des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*. Volksliedstudien, 1 (Münster: Waxmann, 2001); see also my study: "Liederrepertoire and Themenvielfalt: Vom didaktisch-religiösen Liedgut zum Liebes- und Trinklied. Die Begegnung zwischen dem hohen Mittelalter und dem sechzehnten Jahrhundert: die *Carmina Burana* und Georg Forsters Liederbücher," *Lied und populäre Kultur: Jahrbuch des deutschen Volksliedarchivs* 52 (2007): 53–82.

<sup>89</sup> This has been discussed, of course, many times already, but see one of the latest studies on this

Moreover, it deserves to be noted that the early modern stage provided much space for the open display of sexuality, especially through verbal allusions, gestures, and, above all, themes that did not lack in any frankness and openness regarding the human body and sexuality, whether these terms meant the same as today, or whether they have to be read in their own distinct, mental-historical context.<sup>90</sup> If we extended our investigation further and also included scholarly, medical, and philosophical discussions of the erotic imagination, we would easily come across a vast corpus of relevant documents that confirm the profound awareness about the significance of sexuality both for the individual's physical health and for the desired fertility. Of course, by the eighteenth, and even much more by the nineteenth, century the public suppression of sexuality and its discourse intensified considerably, forcing many writers and artists to resort to more sophisticated metaphors, literary masks, allegorical screens, double-entendre in their rhetorical approaches, and other poetic and artistic strategies.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, the artistic, and also prurient, interest in the nude body, mostly female, with its long tradition harking back at least to the Renaissance, and considering the male nude, as far back as to Greek antiquity, has continued until today.<sup>92</sup>

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topic which nicely summarizes the basic aspects of this genre and provides a good survey of the history of relevant research literature, María del Carmen Balbuena Tórezano, *La canción de alba en la lírica alemana de la baja edad media: Análisis de los poemas del Monje de Salzburgo*. Estudios Literarios: Colección Nuevos Horizontes, 16 (Córdoba: Servicio de Publicaciones Universidad de Córdoba, 2007), 160–61. For an examination of late-medieval and early-modern German dawn-songs, see Albrecht Classen, "Das deutsche Tagelied in seinen spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Varianten," *Etudes Germaniques* 54, 2 (1999): 173–96. See also, at least for a good summary from a comparative perspective, Gale Sigal, *Erotic Dawn-Songs of the Middle Ages: Voicing the Lyric Lady* (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1996).

<sup>90</sup> *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Susan Zimmerman (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*, ed. Carole Levin and Karen Robertson. Studies in Renaissance Literature, 10 (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991); see also Jody Enders, *Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 29–42.

<sup>91</sup> See the contributions to *Imagination und Sexualität: Pathologien der Einbildungskraft im medizinischen Diskurs der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Stefanie Zaun, Daniela Watzke, and Jörn Steigerwald. Analecta Romanica, 71 (Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 2004).

<sup>92</sup> Lyndal Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 97, comments: "Pornography exists on the margins of visibility. It circulates in terms of being both explicit and illicit; it is characterized both by a relentless display of sexual difference and the sexualized female body, and by its existence within the covert, hidden and disguised spaces of public and private culture."

## 7. The Literary Evidence Revisited

Before we rush into the early modern age, however, let us review briefly some relevant literary examples from the earlier Middle Ages and then work our way up to the Renaissance, creating a cyclical argument. After all, the same observation can be made with respect to erotic literature, at least since the early twelfth century, whereas the world of the early Middle Ages, at least until ca. 1100, was primarily concerned with more existential questions, at least as far as vernacular literature is concerned.<sup>93</sup>

Already the very first *troubadour* poet, Duke William IX (Guillaume le Neuf, or de Peitieux) of Aquitaine, Count VII of Poitiers, often praised for his highly sophisticated and cultured love songs, reveals an uncanny tendency to transgress his own 'high style' and to inject sly comments, prurient accounts, and deft, if not highly graphic, sexual imagery. In a surprisingly carefree approach, the singer announces in "Farai un vers, pos mi sonelh" that women tend to act wrongly if they cause grief and sorrow for a knight, when they ultimately all want the same thing, sex. Projecting a theatrical setting, the poet presents himself as a knight roaming the countryside on a search for an erotic adventure, when he comes across the wife of Lord Guari and the wife of Lord Bernard. Fooling them by pretending to be an imbecile, incapable of speaking properly and communicating anything meaningful, he only utters the onomatopoeic terms: "'Barbariol, Barbariol, / Barbarian.'"<sup>94</sup>

Almost assured of having found a willing victim to enjoy illicit sexual pleasures, they take him home and feed and bath him first, but then test him a second time, and now really, using a cat's claw on his naked back. William, as his own poetic projection, withstands the pain and does not reveal his secret plan, convincing

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<sup>93</sup> Late antique poetry and other genres could be used as powerful arguments to the contrary, see Cynthia White, *Concordia Virginitatis: Passionate Marriage in Paulinus of Nola*, "Words of Love and Love of Words", ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 347 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 53–74. See C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, for a discussion of the Latin tradition that antedates the medieval vernacular tradition.

<sup>94</sup> For the historical-critical edition, see Jean Charles Payen, *Le Prince d'Aquitaine: Essais sur Gauillaume IX, son œuvre et son érotique* (Paris: H. Champion, 1980); here I quote from *Lyrics of the Middle Ages: An Anthology*, ed. James J. Wilhelm (New York and London: Garland, 1990), vv. 29–30; see also Anna Kukułka-Wojtasik, "Littérature courtoise ou le libertinage avant la lettre. D'après les Chansons de Guillaume de Poitiers et Jufroi, roman du XIIIe siècle," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 211–24. For libertinage in the eighteenth century, a time when we would expect it, perhaps, the least, see *The Libertine Reader: Eroticism and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Michel Feher (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

them finally that they can trust him being a mute man (13th stanza). Unabashedly he finally concludes his song with the highly graphic, deft, if not raw, stanza:

And I screwed them this many times:  
One hundred and eighty-eight.  
And I almost fractured my straps  
And my gear.  
And I'll never be able to tell you  
My later pain.<sup>95</sup>

Would this be *fin'amor*, or courtly entertainment with the necessary restraint, cultural finesse, esoteric treatment of love in clear separation from the bodily, sexual? Obviously not, and we would not have to search far to find many parallel passages where similarly explicit references and allusions to sexuality come to the surface. After all, the game of courtly love did not exhaust itself in the performative, theatrical discourse, but certainly also included the actual, physical sexual experience.<sup>96</sup> But Guillaume openly displays a male perspective according to which females have no other desires but to enjoy sex with men who display enormous and almost inexhaustible sexual power, perhaps in a form of medieval pornography, following Thomas D. Cooke's study of Old French *fabliaux* in which he draws from Steven Marcus's excellent *The Other Victorians: Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (1967). Pornography, then, would be a term that describes primarily male sexual fantasies about subordinating, willing women who operate basically as sex machines with no particular feelings and adore the size and power of male genitalia. Cooke reaches the significant conclusion regarding pornography at large: "The severe limitation on deep personal relationships, the view of sex as aggression, the reality-distorting

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<sup>95</sup> See also Michel Stanesco, "L'Etrange Aventure d'un faux muet: Blessures symboliques et performances sexuelles," *Cahier de Civilisation Médiévale* 32, 2 (1989): 115–24; Patrice Uhl, "'Farai un vers pos mi sonelh': La Version du chansonnier C. (BN. Fr.856) la cöbla bilingue et le problème du 'latin' ou: 'Tarrababart saramahart' dans Guillaume IX d'Aquitaine," *Cahier de Civilisation Médiévale* 33, 1 (1990): 19–42. Highly problematic, but rather representative of postmodern attempts to identify homosexual aspects everywhere in medieval love literature, irrespective of the actual textual evidence, see Jean-Charles Huchet, *L'amour discourtois: la "fin'amors" chez les premiers troubadours* (Toulouse: Privat, 1987). See, by contrast, the critical and rather convincing comments by Angelica Rieger, "'Gran dezir hai deb en jazer'. Die Bettgeschichten der Trobadors," *Abkehr von Schönheit und Ideal in der Liebeslyrik: Für Peter Brockmeier zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Carolin Fischer and Carola Veit (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2000), 48–65.

<sup>96</sup> Angelica Rieger, "'Granz dezir hai deb en jazer'," 54. For the concept of 'game,' see Albrecht Classen, "Das Spiel mit der Liebe – Leben als Spiel: Versuch einer Neuinterpretation des *Morîz von Craûn*," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 40, 4 (1990): 369–98; id., "Erotik als Spiel, Spiel als Leben, Leben als Erotik: Komparatistische Überlegungen zur Literatur des europäischen Mittelalters," *Mediaevistik* 2 (1989): 7–42.



fantasies, the compulsive need for change within a pattern of endless repetition . . . .<sup>97</sup>

In the Middle High German goliardic narrative, *Herzog Ernst B* (ca. 1220), for instance, we detect a scene that might well be identified as ‘pornographic,’ if we really knew what this term might imply and how we should employ it for a critical discussion of medieval literature without falling into the trap of anachronism, especially because this example does not quite fit with Marcus’s and Cooke’s definitions.<sup>98</sup> The anonymous poet combines the traditional bridal-quest motif with the exotic travelogue and the crusade epic, offering detailed historical background why the protagonist Duke Ernst has to leave Germany and to escape from the Emperor’s Otte’s wrath. Subsequently, Ernst and his men travel through an ever more fanciful Orient and encounter numerous monstrous races, before they can return home. There the duke finally achieves a reconciliation with his the emperor, actually his father-in-law, and hands over some of the miraculous objects and strange-looking people that he had brought back home from his extensive travels.<sup>99</sup>

Once the hero and his men have left Constantinople, they lose their direction during a storm and end up in a mysterious country, Grippiâ, populated by crane people, that is, by people who are half human and half cranes. At first, however, no one is to be seen because the entire city is empty, though big festivities have been prepared. Soon, the Grippians return from a military campaign in which they had defeated the king of India, then had killed him and drowned his wife. They have kidnapped the only survivor, the princess, and the king of Grippia is now determined to marry her, irrespective of the completely different bodily shapes

<sup>97</sup> Thomas D. Cooke, “Pornography, the Comic Spirit, and the Fabliaux,” *The Humor of the Fabliaux: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. id. and Benjamin L. Honeycutt (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 137–62; here 146.

<sup>98</sup> For recent discussions of the highly complex and ambivalent term ‘pornography,’ see James McDonald, *A Dictionary of Obscenity, Taboo & Euphemism* (London: Sphere Books, 1988), v–xi; Kerstin Mey, *Art and Obscenity* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2007), 5–18.

<sup>99</sup> *Herzog Ernst: Ein mittelalterliches Abenteuerbuch*. In der mittelhochdeutschen Fassung B nach der Ausgabe von Karl Bartsch mit den Bruchstücken der Fassung A herausgegeben, übersetzt, mit Anmerkungen und einem Nachwort versehen von Bernhard Sowinski. Revised and corrected ed. (1970; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1979). For an analysis of the exotic experiences, see Alexandra Stein, “Die Wundervölker des *Herzog Ernst* (B): Zum Problem körpergebundener Authentizität im Medium der Schrift,” *Fremdes wahrnehmen – fremdes Wahrnehmen: Studien zur Geschichte der Wahrnehmung und zur Begegnung von Kulturen in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Wolfgang Harms and C. Stephen Jaeger (Stuttgart and Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1997), 21–48; see also my studies: “Medieval Travel into an Exotic Orient: The *Spielmannsepos* *Herzog Ernst* as a Travel into the Medieval Subconsciousness,” *Lesarten. New Methodologies and Old Texts*, ed. Alexander Schwarz. Tausch, 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: New York, and Paris: 1990), 103–24; and id., “Multiculturalism in the German Middle Ages? The Rediscovery of a Modern Concept in the Past: The Case of *Herzog Ernst*,” *Multiculturalism and Representation. Selected Essays*, ed. John Rieder and Larry E. Smith (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 198–219.

which would make their sexual union impossible. Duke Ernst and his companion Wetzel observe all this from the safe position up on a tower where they can also look into the festive halls where the wedding celebrations take place. Briefly, the narrator comments on how the crane king tries to console his young bride and to establish some kind of tender relationship with her, informing us: “als dicke er sie kuste, / den snabel stiez er ir in den munt” (3244; everytime he kissed her, he pushed his beak into her mouth). This image, however, proves to be highly erotic and can only be read in clear sexual terms, especially as the narrator continues to underscore the physical nature of this kind of kissing: “solh minne was ir ê unkunt / die wîl sie was in Indîâ” (3246–47; such love had been unknown to her when she still lived in India). As if this allusion were not enough, he also remarks: “dô muoses sich in Grippîâ / sô getâner minne nieten / under unkunden dieten” (3248–51; she had to submit under such a kind of love in Grippia among strange people).

The phallic nature of the king's beak does not need further elaboration, especially since he pokes it into her mouth, making her extremely uncomfortable. But once Ernst and his companion have been discovered in their hiding place, the courtiers and the king believe that they are knights in the service of the deceased king of India, they all attack the princess and stab her to death with their beaks. How would we have to read this metaphor; is it simply a natural object, as in the case of cranes, or is it a tool, as in the bedroom scene, or is it a representative of the phallus, as during the festival? A clear answer does not emerge; instead we would have to accept that the poet deliberately evoked a highly charged erotic imagery to dramatize the curious scene and to play with our own fantasy. After all, medieval art just teemed with phallic references and objects, whether we think of the phallic marotte and fool phallicism, the phallic hood and bagpipe, then the foxtail, and other objects, often even within a religious context, such as amulets, pilgrimage images, and the like.<sup>100</sup> As Malcolm Jones rightly emphasizes, “That thrusting weapons such as spears, swords and knives are phallic symbols is not a discovery of modern psychoanalysis.”<sup>101</sup> And he adds, most appropriately: “In symbolic terms, the sexual counterpart of the sword or knife is, of course, the scabbard or sheath, as attested by the modern medical use of Latin *vagina*, and the relationship of the two is occasionally spelled out in late medieval literature, as in *Der Kurz Hannentanz*, a 15thC. German *fastnachtspiel* in which the maiden says to the young man, *ich pin di schaid, ir seit das schwert*.”<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, 106–112.

<sup>101</sup> Malcolm Jones, “Sex and Sexuality in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art,” 199.

<sup>102</sup> Malcolm Jones, “Sex and Sexuality in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art,” 200. This play to which he refers is contained in Adelbert von Keller's *Fastnachtspiele aus dem fünfzehnten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Litterarischer Verein, 1853), vol. 2, 717, line 17.

A rich source of lewd or bawdy comments, ironic or not, subtle or not, can be found in much medieval and Renaissance literature, such as in Walther von der Vogelweide's famous "Under der linden" song,<sup>103</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach's famous *Parzival*,<sup>104</sup> Juan Ruiz's *Libro de buen amor*, or Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale* contained in his *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>105</sup> Some of his protagonists treat women as nothing but sex objects, and even within marriages some of the husbands behave most crudely and think only in physical terms when they refer to their wives. Rape and crude sex seem to be rampant, and it takes a lot of courtly education, struggle among the various knights, and religious instruction until the ultimate refinement and cultural development has been achieved. The narrator himself has little hesitation to address sexuality in most specific terms, though he does not necessarily approve of the kind of violence that tends to result from men's abuse of women.

Blake Lee Spahr, for instance, comments on Parzival's father, Gahmuret: "his attitude toward love is more than simply light-hearted; it is frivolous and irresponsible. To him, it is an adventure of the lightest sort and nothing more. The woman is a mere sex object, to be discarded with only the slightest pangs of conscience." This finds its complement in the narrator's own attitude, as Spahr continues: "Wolfram, in the *persona* of the narrator, tells us concerning Parzival's having failed to take advantage of Jeschûte—in other words, having failed to rape her when he finds her half-naked and defenseless in her tent . . . ." <sup>106</sup> In other words, medieval poets had no problem with playful allusions to sexuality, relying on *double entendres*, metaphorical language, and other rhetorical elements.<sup>107</sup> This does not necessarily mean that Wolfram was a proponent of explicitly sexist language and macho behavior, especially since he has Gahmuret being killed early in the romance, which ultimately means long years of suffering for his fatherless son, and since he views the transgression committed by the Grail king, Anfortas,

<sup>103</sup> Heike Sievert, *Studien zur Liebeslyrik Walthers von der Vogelweide*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 506 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990).

<sup>104</sup> For a broad introduction to Wolfram, see Joachim Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*. 8th, completely rev. ed. Sammlung Metzler, 36 (1964; Stuttgart: Metzler, 2004); Jame W. Marchand, "Wolfram's Bawdy," *Monatshefte* 69 (1977): 131–49; Edward R. Haymes, "The Sexual Stranger: The Sexual Quest in Wolfram's *Parzival*," *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden. Medieval Cultures, 12 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 80–91.

<sup>105</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, "Mittelalterliche Sexualität – die Quellen," *Privatisierung der Triebe? Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. Frühneuezeit-Studien, 1 (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 47–110. See also Ernst Englisch, "Die Ambivalenz in der Beurteilung sexueller Verhaltensweisen im Mittelalter," *ibid.*, 167–86.

<sup>106</sup> Blake Lee Spahr, "Gahmuret's Erection: Rising to Adventure," *Monatshefte* LXXXIII, 4 (1991): 403–13; here 405. See also James A. Schultz, "Parzival, Courtly Love, and the History of Sexuality," *Poetica* 38, 1–2 (2006): 31–59.

<sup>107</sup> See the contributions to this volume by Siegfried Christoph and Albrecht Classen ("Naked Men").

highly negatively. Nevertheless, in terms of sexuality, Wolfram, in his portrayal of Gahmuret, offers a "description, marvellous for its ribald humor and bawdy suggestiveness, . . . of an unabashedly candid coxman."<sup>108</sup> More broadly conceived, Wolfram integrates numerous jokes, some of which are of an egregiously sexual nature, with which he deconstructs traditional concepts of gender relationships, power structures, moral norms, and ethical values, although today it would be rather difficult to follow the strategy that underlies such jokes because of profound changes that have determined the cultural-historical developments since then.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, in what might be the most surprising feature of this masterpiece of Middle High German romance literature, the poet does not hesitate to incorporate unmistakable episodes where a male protagonist almost rapes a lady, such as when Parzival overpowers Jeschute, though the young man does not yet seem to know much of erotic love or sexuality (Book 129, 16–Book 132, 34), or where another protagonist is publicly condemned for the very same crime which he has, however, actually committed (Urjans, Book 504, 7–Book 528, 30).<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Spahr, "Gahmuret's Erection," 411. Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht, Einführung zum Text von Bernd Schirok (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998).

<sup>109</sup> See, for example, Kurt Bertau, "Versuch über tote Witze bei Wolfram von Eschenbach," orig. 1973; here I have used the copy contained in id., *Wolfram von Eschenbach: Neun Versuche über Subjektivität und Ursprünglichkeit in der Geschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1983), 60–109. As to the erotic relationships between the genders in Wolfram's *Parzival*, see Sonja Emmerling, *Geschlechterbeziehungen in den Gawan-Büchern des "Parzival": Wolframs Arbeit an einem literarischen Modell*. Hermaea: Germanistische Forschungen, Neue Folge, 100 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003). She entirely ignores, however, not untypical of modern philological research that continues to reveal certain prudish tendencies, the blatant sexual interests expressed by the chivalric protagonists; instead she focuses, and hence simply reiterates, on the traditional aspects concerning love and marriage. She carefully, if not prudishly, dances around the rather steamy sexual atmosphere involving Gawan and Antikonie, as if the actual topic openly addressed here would be too embarrassing.

<sup>110</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Medieval: Treatment of Rape in Literature and Law," *Women's Studies Encyclopedia*, ed. Helen Tierney. Vol. III (New York, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1991), 308–10; Peter Meister, "A Little Acknowledged Theme in the Courtly Romance: Rape," *Quondam et Futurus: A Journal of Arthurian Interpretations* 1, 4 (1991): 23–38 (with a response by Mary Lynne Dittmar); John M. Clifton-Everest, "Knights-Servitor and Rapist Knights: A Contribution to the Parzival/Gawan Question," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 119, 3 (1990): 290–317; and Anna-Susanna Matthias, "Ein Handhaftverfahren aus dem Perceval/Parzivalroman (Der Prozess des Urjans)," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 34, 1–2 (1984): 29–43. See also Wolfgang Spiewok, "Die Vergewaltigung in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters," *Sexuelle Perversionen im Mittelalter*, 193–206.

## 8. Eroticization of the Reader/Listener

Erotic literature often operates on various levels, offering allusions, suggestions, thinly veiled descriptions, and so provides enormously productive material for the imagination. Valerie Traub emphasizes, for instance, "that eroticism *is* cultural practice—material, ideological, and subjective . . ." And: "the problems posed by erotic desire demand feminist analysis from two angles simultaneously: historical materialist analysis of ideological and material practices, and psychoanalysis of subjective states of desire. Indeed, the case of early modern homoeroticism(s) demonstrates the extent to which the opposition between the material (institutions and practices) and the psychic (desires and fantasies) is a false one."<sup>111</sup> This is beautifully illustrated by the anonymous Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, although there no phallus shows its head, and hardly any other body part is exposed, as is so often the case in Old French *fabliaux* and *farce*.<sup>112</sup> However, both the protagonist's and the reader's/listener's mind is eroticized, and there can be no denial that the poet specifically intended to predicate the critical scene of his poem on a most graphic erotic, if not sexual, setting in which the male protagonist experiences one of the most challenging seductions by a woman. Whereas before he was the acclaimed lady's man, here he suddenly emerges as a weak partner in a most dramatic game based on the power of sexual temptation. Whereas normally a man tries to woo a lady or to convince her to love him, here the opposite is the case, and the sexualized body plays a most important role in the entire bedroom episode.

Sir Gawain has accepted the challenge by the Green Knight to behead him and then, within a year's time, to allow the latter to do the same with him. This grizzly set-up gains additional dramatic value because Gawain does not even know where he can find the Green Knight and must go on a long quest, until he arrives, in the midst of winter and shortly before Christmas, at Castle Hautdesert where he is warmly welcomed by the lord, Bercilak, and two ladies, one young, the other old. The contrast between these two female bodies sheds considerable light on the fascination with the body and the attractiveness of the sexual nature of the young woman:

Ho wat<sub>3</sub> þe fayrest in felle, of flesche, and of lyre,  
And of compas, and colour, and costes, of alle oþer,  
And wener þen Wenore, as þe wy<sub>3</sub>e þor<sub>3</sub>t.

[She was the fairest in skin, in stature, and in face,

<sup>111</sup> Valerie Traub, *Circulations of Sexuality*, 114.

<sup>112</sup> Despite the many problems with the theoretical premises, see E. Janes Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

And in form, and color, with captivating features,  
And more gorgeous than Guenevere, concluded Gawain.]

Then follows an almost disgusting description of the old lady, very much in the vein of the classical *vetula*,<sup>113</sup> only to be contrasted once again with the appealing female flesh of the young:

Kerhofes of þat on, wyth mony cler perle<sub>3</sub>,  
Hir brest and hir bry<sub>3</sub>t þrote bare displayed,  
Schon schyrer þen snawe þat schede<sub>3</sub> on hille<sub>3</sub>.<sup>114</sup>

[Kerchiefs on the one, with many clear pearls,  
Beautifully displayed her breast and bright throat,  
Shining sheerer than snow that sheds on hills.]

The sexual attraction which Lacy Bercilak exerts on Gawain is self-evident, especially because the gaze is directed specifically toward her upper torso, to her neck and her breasts, revealing much for the male imagination, as was a very common practice in medieval courtly literature, closely following the ancient rhetorical tradition of the *personarum descriptio a corpore* with its focus on the *puella bella*.<sup>115</sup> In fact, Gawain quickly learns that his true challenge does not consist in meeting the Green Knight, which will happen at the end, for sure, but in dealing with Lady Bercilak. We all know that her husband strikes the symbolic deal with Gawain to exchange all spoils that each of them might hunt and win during the day with the other because he has set up a hunting game both outside of the castle and inside. His wife closely cooperates with him and makes the best efforts to seduce Gawain sexually for three days. While her husband is pursuing individual animals at the edge of the forest, which he then might exchange with his guest as part of the bargain, his wife enters Gawain's bedroom and tries her best, relying on sweet talk and her increasingly disrobed body, to seduce, or to hunt, the Arthurian knight. In fact, whereas her husband pursues the individual animals at the edge of the forest, his wife sits down at the edge of Gawain's bed and makes her best effort to convince Gawain to accept her as his beloved, thereby challenging all courtly values and *mores*. But at first the protagonist defends

<sup>113</sup> See the contributions to *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 2 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007) by Gretchen Mieskowski (299–319), Karen Pratt (321–42), and Connie Scarborough (343–56).

<sup>114</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Dual-Language Version*, ed. and trans. William Vantuono. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1265 (New York and London: Garland, 1991), vv. 943–45 and 954–56.

<sup>115</sup> *puella bella: Die Beschreibung der schönen Frau in der Minnelyrik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Rüdiger Krüger. Helfant Texte, T 6 (Stuttgart: helfant edition, 1986). See especially his critical discussion of the rhetorical elements and strategies of relevant passages in the various literary texts in which sexual seductions are fully at play, 110–56.

himself and resists all titillations when she enters his bedroom and sits down at the end of his bed, clearly and unmistakably the site of sexual experiences, both here and in countless examples of courtly love poetry.<sup>116</sup>

Every viewer, or listener, would have understood immediately how much the protagonist and the respective animal hunted by the host on each of the three days, are part of his game of the erotic.<sup>117</sup> There are many elements of this seductive game that would deserve to be examined in greater detail, but numerous extensive and relevant interpretations have already been carried out, and in part Gawain's specific responses have been discussed in other contexts as well.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* deserves to be examined one more time within our context because the seduction scene involving the male protagonist and Sir Bercelak's wife invites a detailed analysis regarding the relevance of the human body, sensuality, and the sexual attraction between the genders.

The lady knows only too well how much Sir Gawain responds to erotic stimulation and that he only needs to be prodded on slightly to arouse his erotic interest. By the same token, Sir Gawain represents the general audience, probably male, and his performance represents what late-medieval courtly society thinks about eroticism at large. Whereas normally all courtly literature has the man woo the lady,<sup>119</sup> here she approaches him and makes the first move. The first morning we do not learn much about her physical appearance, but the second day already things have changed considerably. The lady rhetorically forces Gawain to give her a kiss, which he then can exchange with Lord Bercilak as part of their agreement. The third morning, she makes every possible effort to seduce the attractive guest sexually:

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<sup>116</sup> Angelica Rieger, "'Granz dezir hai de ben jazer'," 62–63.

<sup>117</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Minnesang als Spiel. Sinnkonstitution auf dem Schachbrett der Liebe," *Studi medievali*, Serie Terza, XXXVI, 1 (1995): 211–39.

<sup>118</sup> For further interpretation of this allegorical poem, see *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Denton Fox. *Twentieth Century Interpretations* (Eaglewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1968); Ad Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); J. A. Burrow, *The Gawain Poet* (Horndrove, Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2001); *Sir Gawain and the Classical Tradition: Essays on the Ancient Antecedents*, ed. E. L. Ridsen (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, 2006).

<sup>119</sup> A remarkable exception proves to be the anonymous Middle High German *mære* "Nonnenturnier" where a knight is wooed by all ladies at court and has total freedom to choose whomever he wants, rejecting some, selecting others at free will. At the end, however, one of his victims gets the better of him and makes him not only an utter fool, but also can convince him to demasculinize himself, to castrate himself, which then forces him out of society for the rest of his life. For a full discussion, see Albrecht Classen's contribution to this volume.

Hir pryuen face and hir þrote þrowen al naked,  
 Hir brest bare bifore, and bihinde eke.  
 Ho come, wythinne þe chambre dore and closes hit hir after,  
 wayue<sub>3</sub> up a wyndow and on þe wy<sub>3</sub>e calle<sub>3</sub>. (1740–43)

[Her enthralling face and her throat were thrillingly naked,  
 Her breast bare in front, and shoulders in back also;  
 She comes charmingly to the chamber door and closes it after her,  
 Opens a window wide to awaken the knight.]

Gawain can hardly resist the temptation that she holds out to him, with every impulse in him longing to make love with this most attractive lady. However, his courtly education holds him back, and also his fear of the dangerous encounter with the Green Knight in which he would certainly have to face death. And considering that he might die, with such a sin on his consciousness, he cannot accept her unabashed offer to sleep with her since it would be treason against the lord of the castle (1775). Ultimately, however, as an obvious substitute for the sex act, he agrees to accept the seemingly simple gift of her green belt because it promises to save his life, even in the terrible encounter with the horrendous, devilish opponent. The erotic symbolism of the belt cannot be overlooked, considering where she takes it from and how she unfastens it from her body:

Ho la<sub>3</sub>t a lace ly<sub>3</sub>tly, þat þat leke vmbe hir syde<sub>3</sub>,  
 Knit vpon hir kyrtel vnder þe clere mantyle  
 Gered hit wat<sub>3</sub> wyth grene sylke and wyth golde schaped,  
 No<sub>3</sub>t bot arounde brayden, beten wyth fyngre<sub>3</sub>. (1830–33)

[Quickly she grabbed a belt, that which was girded around her sides,  
 Coiled around her kirtle under the clinging cloak.  
 It was geared with green silk and with gold trimmed,  
 Embroidered only along the edges, embellished with pendants.]

Although only a belt, its metaphorical function proves to be striking, directing our imaginary gaze directly at her hip, hence toward her genitals, which is a common strategy in medieval literature, if we think, for instance, of the famous belt which mighty Siegfried takes from the Icelandic queen Brünhild in the Middle High German heroic epic *Nibelungenlied*. Although he does not rape her in the literal sense of the word, he subdues her nevertheless and forces her to accept King Gunther as her unwanted husband. As Jerold C. Frakes observes, “Siegfried the proxy rapist merely steals the ring and belt after brutally subduing Brünhild. Just as Gunther literally appropriates Brünhild’s genitals several stanzas later (681, 2), here Siegfried takes symbolic possession of them in stealing the belt and ring.”<sup>120</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Jerold C. Frakes, *Brides and Doom: Gender, Property, and Power in Medieval German Women’s Epic*.



The need to decipher the semantic meaning of the belt evokes both the concept of communicative decoding being at play here, in an epistemological sense, and the concept of the erotic language that thinly veils the sexual connotation.<sup>121</sup> The same observation applies to miniatures of amorous couples in medieval manuscripts, such as the one for the poet Rubin in the famous *Manesse* manuscript (early fourteenth century), and to late-medieval Dutch popular songs that deal with merchants offering belts and needles for sale, all of these openly signaling erotic messages.<sup>122</sup>

It does not matter that Lady Bercilak keeps her clothes on because she has already mentally derobed herself for Gawain and seduced him with the promise of life. But even before this significant exchange, erotically so highly charged, the very moment of the kiss and her physical closeness exuded intense erotic emotions:

Wi<sub>3</sub>t wallande joye warmed his hert;  
Wyth smope smylyng and smolt, þay smeten into merþe,  
Pat al wat<sub>3</sub> blis and bonchef þat breke hem bitwene,  
and wyne. (1762–65)

[Joy welling warmly awakened his heart;  
With smooth smiling so stirring, they slipped into mirth,  
And all was blissful and buoyant that between them did pass  
with delight.]

The irony, of course, consists in Gawain being the hunted object, parallel to Lord Bercilak's hunt of animals at the edge of the forest, and in his need to muster all his rhetorical skills in resisting the lady's attempts to seduce him, although he would not have hesitated one moment to accept the woman's offer to sleep with her under different circumstances.<sup>123</sup> At closer analysis we also discover the highly erotic nature of language, as the words being exchanged between Gawain and the

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Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 125. He is, however, not the first to identify the sexual symbolism of the belt, as he refers to Hans Naumann's study "Brünhilds Gürtel," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 70 (1933): 46–48; here 47. See also Albrecht Classen, "Der Gürtel als Objekt und Symbol in der Literatur des Mittelalters. Marie de France, *Nibelungenlied*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* und Dietrich von der Glezze," to appear in: *Mediaevistik*.

<sup>121</sup> Robert J. Blanch and Julian N. Wasserman, *From Pearl to Gawain: Forme to Fynisment* (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1995), 21–25, focus on the communicative dimension only, whereas the erotic also needs to be considered. See now Francis Ingledew, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Order of the Garter* (Notre Dame: University of Indiana Press, 2006).

<sup>122</sup> Johan H. Winkelman, "Mittelniederländische Tragezeichen und die nordwesteuropäische Kulturlandschaft," 207–12.

<sup>123</sup> David Lampe, "Sex Roles and the Role of Sex in Medieval English Literature," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, 401–26; here 415–16.

lady teasingly dance around the same topic, hardly keeping the true intentions as a secret, constantly aiming to reveal the sexual intentions.<sup>124</sup> Although Gawain should not accept the green belt from her, unless he would be willing to pass it along to Bercilak as part of their barter, her sweet talk makes him accept her gift, and it is, indeed, an erotic gift of the highest order, considering where she took it from—her own hip and groin—and what it proffers the receiver:

And ho bere on hym þe belt and bede hit hym swyþe,  
 And he granted and hym gafe with a goud wyll,  
 And biso<sub>3</sub>t hym, for hir sake, disceuer hit neuer,  
 Bot to lelly layne for hir lorde; þe leude hym acorde<sub>3</sub>  
 Pat neuer wy<sub>3</sub>e schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þat twayne,  
 for no<sub>3</sub>te. (1860–65)

[and she displayed the bright belt and bade him to take it,  
 And she granted and consigned it with a good will,  
 And beseeched him, for her sake, to show it never,  
 But to hide it from her husband; the hero agrees indeed.]

We also should consider another late-medieval text where the transition from thinly veiled discourse on courtly love to explicit sexuality can also be observed. In general, however, this is always the case in most literary accounts concerned with the erotic. Whenever the poet deals with some erotic issues, the real concern quickly proves to be the sexual.

After having overcome all relevant obstacles, the central lover decides to crush the opposition to his desires by resorting to violence and to replace erotic love with physical sex. The most famous dialogue about love ever formulated might well be in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la rose*. After having discussed all kinds of aspects concerning love, having dismissed all ethical and moral concerns possibly expressed by the poet, we learn of the crudest and most controversial aspect of love possible—sex. The imagery of the garden, the symbolic interpretation of individual aspects of the specific wall separating the lover from his desired rose, and the allegory of the flower and the military operation to win love, speak a most explicit language of love, but more specifically of sex.

Whereas Guillaume de Lorris maintained a rhetorical pretense, pursuing exclusively a courtly motif, Jean de Meun took a very different approach, ripping apart all literary masks concerning the topic of courtly love. Whereas in the first part of this famous allegorical romance the lover simply pursues a rose, facing all kinds of opposing forces, such as jealousy, covetousness, old age, hypocrisy, and so forth, in the second part matters reach their final point insofar as the lover does

<sup>124</sup> Jean Jost, "What Kind of Words are These? Courtly and Marital Words of Love in the *Franklin's Tale* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 395–419.

no longer have to face the various forces threatening him regarding his love. Now, in the final development, the Tower of Shame is not only besieged, but also taken, and the goal of all of his amatory efforts is eventually reached. Whereas the first part by Guillaume still espoused the traditional literary symbolism and allegorical approach, Jean quickly dispenses with it and addresses the basic sexual nature of the erotic discourse. When the Lover finally makes his way into the Ivory Tower, the metaphorical language quickly fades away and gives room for very specific indications of what making love means in sexual terms:

E port o moi par grant confort  
 Escharpe et bordon roit et fort,  
 Tel qu'il n'a mestier de ferrer  
 Por jornoier ne por errer.  
 L'escharpe est de bonne feture,  
 D'une pel souple sans cousture;  
 Mes sachiés qu'el n'iere pas vuide  
 Deus martelés par grant estuide,  
 Par estevoir et par grant cure  
 I avoit dedens mis Nature.<sup>125</sup>

[With greatest effort I conveyed with me  
 My scrip and pilgrim staff so stiff and stout  
 That it no ferrule needed to assure  
 That it would hold the path and never slip.  
 The leather was of a supple leather made  
 Most skillfully, without a single seam;  
 Nor was it empty. As it seemed to me,  
 Since one had opened it, Nature had placed  
 Most diligently, with the greatest care,  
 The hammer therewithin together laid.<sup>126</sup>]

There would not be any need to investigate in detail what the imagery here implies, especially as the narrator quickly confirms that he did not need any instruction on how to use the tools that were given him, and he even takes away any possibility of misreading his words: "Si ferai je certainement / Se j'en puis

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<sup>125</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*. Chronologie, préface et établissement du texte par Daniel Poirion (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1974), 21353–62 (note the slight variation in verse count in the English translation). For a convenient summary of our current state of knowledge about him, see William C. Calin, "Jean de Meun," *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia*, ed. William W. Kibler and Grover A. Zinn (New York and London: Garland, 1995), 488–90.

<sup>126</sup> Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*. Trans. Harry W. Robbins. Ed., and with an Introd. Charles W. Dunn (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962), vv. 21352–41. I chose this translation because it is one of the closest to the original Old French, but there remain, admittedly, many problems with the exact rendering of the Old French into English.

avoir l'esement, / Car Dieu merci bien sai forgier. / Si vous di bien que plus ai chier  
 / Mes deus martelés et m'escharpe / Que ma citole ne ma harpe" (21371–76; "I  
 know well how to do such smithy work. / Truly I tell you that I better love / My  
 scrip and hammers than my lute and harp. / When such equipment Nature  
 furnished me, / Much was I honored; and I learned its use / Till I became a  
 craftsman wise and good," 21369–74).<sup>127</sup>

But Jean de Meun was not at all an exception, and certainly not the first to play with such bawdy language, as we have seen already above with Wolfram von Eschenbach and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Another, also earlier example would be the anonymous *Mai und Beafloer* (late thirteenth century, so about contemporary with the *Roman de la rose*) where two young people finally can marry despite his mother's great opposition, which later will lead to her attempt to have her daughter-in-law executed for alleged adultery with two priests. In the first wedding night, however, everything seems to be most harmonious, despite some initial problems resulting from their inhibitions and embarrassment, not knowing how to handle sexuality per se and how to let down their shame barriers in order to proceed to the coitus. Also, Beafloer initially insists on their common prayers in preparation for the final union and to fend off any possible temptation by the devil, which does not do much, however, to distract Mai from the actual purpose of their first night together. Finally—Mai's patience has worn thin, as his repeated gazes indicate—he approaches her, admonishes her to stop praying because she has fulfilled all expectations, then lifts her up and carries her to the bed. Both lie down next to each other after they have taken off their clothes. At this point a pause sets in because of considerable "scham" (3676; shame) which both feel due to their youth and lack of experience. However, as the narrator emphasizes, soon enough "sines vater art" (3679; his father's inheritance) emboldens him to embrace her and to begin the game of love.<sup>128</sup> The narrator tells us specifically what happens next, but yet he refrains from focusing on the bodily aspects:

<sup>127</sup> Simon Gaunt, "Obscene Hermeneutics in Troubadour Lyric," *Medieval Obscenities*, 85–104; here 95; see also his "Bel Accueil and the Improper Allegory of the *Roman de la Rose*," *New Medieval Literatures* 2 (1998): 65–93. Further, Alastair Minnis, "From Coilles to Bel Chose: Discourses of Obscenity in Jean de Meun and Chaucer," *Medieval Obscenities*, 156–78, who argues for an interpretation of the obscenity in Jean's part of the *Roman* as a linguistic strategy of a strongly satirical kind.

<sup>128</sup> David N. Yeandle, 'schame' im Alt- und Mittelhochdeutschen bis um 1210: Eine sprach- und literaturgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Herausbildung einer ethischen Bedeutung. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2001), emphasizes that Wolfram von Eschenbach was the first Middle High German poet to attribute a higher ethical value to 'shame' (234–35).

Ein sune ergie do minnenschlich.  
 Da von si wurden vreudenrich,  
 da sie liplichen lagen  
 vnd suzzer minne phlagen.  
 Do er wewant ir reinicheit,  
 daz si was ein reinev meit (3681–85).<sup>129</sup>

[Their nervousness then gave way to love.  
 It filled both with great joy  
 when they lay down in tender embrace  
 and practiced the sweet love.  
 Then he discovered her purity,  
 that is, that she was still a virgin.]

The erotic atmosphere is thickly layered and yet innocent as well because it is the wedding night, and the couple is supposed anyway to engage in sexual union as part of the nuptial ritual. The naive youthfulness of these two people and their first sexual experience together conjoin to create a most erotic, though still unobjectionable scene of great poetic quality.<sup>130</sup> The situation in the *Roman de la rose*, on the other hand, proves to be entirely different insofar as the intent there is to evoke erotic fantasy and to go even one step further, tearing away practically all pretenses and to confront the audience with poetic images of the raw sexual act. In fact, here we might encounter a clear case of medieval pornography, if we consider the following passage:

[Trais en sus ung poi la cortine  
 Qui les reliques encortine;]  
 De l'ymagete m'apressoï  
 Que du saintuaire pres soi;  
 Mout le baisai devotement,  
 Et por l'estuier sauvement  
 Veil mon bordon metre en l'archiere  
 Ou lescharpe pendoit derriere.

<sup>129</sup> *Mai und Beafloer*. Herausgegeben, übersetzt, kommentiert und mit einer Einleitung von Albrecht Classen. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 6 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2006).

<sup>130</sup> Erotic love between two very young people, which then results in a sexual union, was not an uncommon theme in medieval, particularly not in Middle High German literature, see Albrecht Classen, "Wolframs von Eschenbach *Titulel*-Fragmente und Johanns von Würzburg *Wilhelm von Österreich*: Höhepunkte der höfischen Minnereden," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 37 (1993): 75–102. Parallel examples would be the Old French *Aucassin et Nicolette* and the pan-European *Floris and Blanchefloer*; both texts in English translation are contained in my *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, Sections 15 and 17. See also Nicole Clifton, "The Function of Childhood in *Amis and Amiloun*," *Mediaevalia* 22, 1 (1998): 35–57; Jean Jost, "Medieval Children: Treatment in Middle English Literature," *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005), 307–28.

Bien le cuidai lancier de bout,  
 Mes il resort, et je rebout;  
 Mes riens n'i vaut, ainçois recule,  
 Enrer n'i puet por chose nule,  
 Car un palis dedens trovai  
 Que je bien sent, mes pas nel voi,  
 Dont l'archiere est dedens hordee  
 Des lors qu'el fu primes fondee,  
 Auques pres de la bordeüre;  
 Plus fort en ert et plus seüre. (21599–616)

[A little then I pushed aside the shroud  
 That curtained the fair relics, and approached  
 The image that I knew was close within.  
 Devotedly I kissed the sacred lace.  
 Safely to sheathe my staff within the shrine,  
 I thrust it through the loophole, while the scrip  
 Dangled behind it. Carefully I tried  
 To thrust it in; it bounded back again.  
 Once more I thrust it in without avail.  
 Always it back recoiled. Try as I might,  
 Nothing could force the staff to enter there.  
 Then I perceived a little barricade,  
 Which though I well could feel I could not see,  
 Quite near the border of the opening,  
 Which from the inside fortified the shrine,  
 . . . . (21554–64)]

The subsequent detailed imagery leaves no doubt about the actual meaning, though the narrator strictly adheres to the material aspect of a siege and his attempts to break through a barrier, which he finally achieves with the help of his staff. As we can tell from the subsequent verses, the lover has accomplished his goal, penetrated his beloved, deflowering her and enjoying carnal knowledge with her. The passage way proves to be very narrow, but it opens up for him: "[Et se bien l'estre du pas sé, / Nus n'i avoit onques passé:] / Je le passai touz li premiers; / Encor n'ere pas coustumiers / Li leus de recevoir passage" (21655–59; "The passage would have been by far too small / For me to traverse it, and well I knew / By this that none had ever passed that way. / I was the first of men to tread that road," 21619–22).<sup>131</sup>

<sup>131</sup> The scholarship on Jean de Meun's part of the *Roman de la rose* is huge, see, for instance, *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); A. J. Minnis, *Magister Amoris: the Roman de la rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). But overall, there is also a remarkable hesitation to deal with the highly provocative

Whether C. S. Lewis had it right when he commented on Jean de Meun remains to be seen: "In one place he is all for ridicule; and the ridicule . . . is lively enough. In another place he follows the school of Chartres; and his naturalism about sex produces noble verses. In a third place he will be a mystic; and on this theme of human and divine love he keeps a respectable place, despite the greatness of those who here become his rivals."<sup>132</sup> We might have to question seriously such a respectful distance to the actually graphic, sexual content of the *Roman*, and would be much better advised to accept that the highly satirical author deftly undermined the artificial pretense of courtly love still projected by Guillaume de Lorris.<sup>133</sup>

There is no disagreement regarding the specifically sexual nature of this last scene, though individual aspects still constitute problematic questions concerning the allegorical meaning and the theological-philosophical interpretation.<sup>134</sup> It actually also finds important confirmation in many explicitly sexual proverbs drawn from the *Roman de la rose*.<sup>135</sup> The lover recommends his readers to follow his model and also to pluck the bud of a fresh rose, which could in fact be read as an open manifesto to unbridled enjoyment of sexuality, especially with a virgin:

Par les rains saisi le rosier,  
Qui plus sont franc que nul osier;  
Et quant a deus mains m'i poi joindre,  
Sovelement et sans moi poindre  
Le bouton pris a eslochie;  
Envis l'eüsse sans hochier.  
Toutes en fis par estevoir  
Les branches croier et movoir,  
Sans ja nul des rainz depecier,  
Car n'i voloi riens blecier;

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conclusion of the *Roman*, see, for example, Peter L. Allen, *The Art of Love: Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the Romance of the Rose*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 79–110.

<sup>132</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936; London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 154.

<sup>133</sup> Noah D. Guynn, "Authorship and Sexual/Allegorical Violence in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la rose*," *Speculum* 79, 3 (2004): 628–59; see also Sylvia Huot, "Bodily Peril: Sexuality and the Subversion of Order in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*," *Modern Language Review* 95, 1 (2000): 41–61.

<sup>134</sup> Joanna Luft, "Unfixing the Rosebud as a Fixture of the Female Sex in Guillaume de Lorris's and Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose*," Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 2004 (*Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A* 66 [2005]: 2207. See also Sara Kay, "Sexual Knowledge: The Once and Future Text of the *Romance of the Rose*," *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices*, ed. Judith Still (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 69–86.

<sup>135</sup> Gavin Richardson, "Sex and Secrecy in Medieval Antifeminists Proverbs," *Proverbium* 22 (2005): 321–36.

Et si m'en couvint il a force  
 Entamer un poi de l'escorce;  
 Autrement avoir ne savoie  
 Ce dont si grant desir avoie. (21705–18)

[I seized the rose tree by her tender limbs  
 That are more lithe than any willow bough,  
 And pulled her close to me with my two hands.  
 Most gently, that I might avoid the thorns,  
 I set myself to loosen that sweet bud  
 That scarcely without shaking could be plucked.  
 I did this all by sheer necessity.  
 Trembling and soft vibration shook her limbs;  
 But they were quite uninjured, for I strove  
 To make no wound, though I could not avoid  
 Breaking a trifling fissure in the skin,  
 Since otherwise I could have found no way  
 To gain the favor I so much desired. (21703–15)]

Of course, Jean's audience would and could not have protested against possible elements of pornography because the ultimate goal, the plucking of the rose bud, remains within the general framework of the entire allegorical verse romance, and ultimately the purpose pursued by the lover in the first part, composed by Guillaume de Lorris, remains the same aimed for by the lover in the second part, except that here the metaphorical language becomes increasingly translucent and openly gives away the secret intention to make love with the lady, hence to deflower the rose and to enjoy sexual union with her.<sup>136</sup>

In light of all previous literary examples, we would be on safe ground to argue that the perceived shock effect of this final passage would not have been the purpose, and also not the actual outcome. Jean de Meun simply took the allegorical strategy by Guillaume de Lorris one step further, but he consistently maintained the literary masquerade. Granted, ultimately there is nothing left to hide, and we know exactly what is going on in this passage, but considering the multitude of discourses and material aspects dealt with in the *Roman de la rose*, it would be absurd to demand that the dimension of sexuality should have been excluded. Neither Jean de Meun nor his audience would have thought that, as the enormously rich manuscript tradition confirms.<sup>137</sup> However, the dramatic contrast between the still rather esoteric discourse about courtly love by Guillaume de Lorris and the much more outspoken, if not unabashed, discussion of the erotic,

<sup>136</sup> See also my survey article, "Jean de Meun," *Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature*, ed. Jay Ruud (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 345–47. See also the contribution to this volume by Reinier Leushuis.

<sup>137</sup> Sylvia Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and Its Medieval Readers: Reception and Manuscript Transmission*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).



sexual implications of the pursuit of the rose by Jean indicates how much the latter deliberately distanced himself from the former, clearly signaling how much he wanted to deconstruct, satirize, and maybe even ridicule, the traditional treatment of love by providing a new context, by displaying a new determination to break down previous barriers between the genders, and by drawing from a new readiness to address basic physical aspects of this relationship, fundamentally determined by sexuality. The parallels to the Old French *fabliaux* or Middle High German *mæren* in this regard cannot be overlooked, especially with respect to their basic attempt to deconstruct some power structures, authorities, or language patterns, predicating their strategies on the play with sexual, at times also pornographic elements, as scholarship has richly demonstrated.<sup>138</sup>

A South-Tyrolean poet, Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445), today regarded as one of the best lyrical composers of his time, confirmed this new approach to courtly love in a number of his Middle High German songs which he occasionally created on the basis of French, Flemish, Low German, and also Italian models.<sup>139</sup> Older scholarship tended to identify him as the last “Minnesinger,” or courtly love poet, primarily because he represented the old tradition and yet also reflected many new trends, though we still cannot identify him as a Renaissance man. For our purposes, some of Oswald’s poems are of greatest significance because he embarked on innovative strategies to deal with courtly love, but now within the context of marriage.<sup>140</sup> In his song “Wol auff, wol an” (Kl. 75), for instance, which begins with a traditional nature scene in the month of May when everyone is invited to enjoy life through dances, singing, and making music, sexuality is specifically described as an integral part of marital happiness. Moreover, as the

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<sup>138</sup> See, especially, Thomas D. Cooke’s seminal study, “Pornography, the Comic Spirit,” 160–61: “These tales characteristically end in a surprise that is so well prepared that the ending, the comic climax, is a deeply satisfying fulfillment . . . . This is true, I believe, no matter how chaotic, farcical, crude, or even obscene the story has been.” For further explorations of this vast genre, see the contributions to *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2007).

<sup>139</sup> Albrecht Classen, *Zur Rezeption norditalienischer Kultur des Trecento im Werk Oswalds von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445)*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 471 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1987); id., “Oswald von Wolkenstein,” *German Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation 1280–1580*, ed. James Hardin and Max Reinhart. Dictionary of Literary Biographies, 179 (Detroit, Washington, DC, and London: Gale Research, 1997), 198–205; for a detailed biography, see Anton Schwob, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: eine Biographie*. 3rd ed. Schriftenreihe des Südtiroler Kulturinstitutes, 4 (1977; Bozen: Athesia, 1989). I am currently preparing the publication of my English translation of Oswald’s complete œuvre (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming). See also Johannes Spicker, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: Die Lieder*. Klassiker Lektüren, 10 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2007), for a generalist introduction, though he voices rather speculative opinions regarding the proper interpretation of Oswald’s marriage and love songs.

<sup>140</sup> Albrecht Classen, *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum frühen 17. Jahrhundert*. Volksliedstudien, 5 (Münster, New York, Munich, and Berlin: Waxmann, 2005), 265–68.

second stanza informs us, the poet himself relates the intimate joys of marital life. The poem describes how husband and wife take a bath together and explore each other's body:

Pring den buttern,  
 lass uns kuttren:  
 "wascha, maidli,  
 mir das schaidli!"  
 "reib mich, knäblin,  
 umb das näblin!  
 hilfst du mir,  
 leicht vach ich dir das rätzli."<sup>141</sup>

[bring the bath tub,  
 let us have some fun:  
 "wash, my dear maid,  
 my head!"  
 "rub, my dear young man,  
 my tummy!  
 If you help me,  
 I might grab the little rat."]

The poet explicitly evokes sexuality and playfully combines the erotic enjoyment that he exchanges with his wife with the return of nature after the cold winter. Sexuality here is tantamount to rebirth and the recovery of life, both among plants and animals and among people. Older scholarship has regularly sidestepped some of the most explicit passages and limited itself to basic philological explanations.<sup>142</sup> Sexuality is here treated as a normal aspect of all existence, as the plants, animals, and people all confirm who go through the same experience in the season of Spring (third stanza).

<sup>141</sup> *Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, ed. Karl Kurt Klein. 3rd, newly rev. and expanded ed. Hans Moser, Norbert Richard Wolf, and Notburga Wolf. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 55 (1962; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987), stanza II, 32–39.

<sup>142</sup> See the commentary by Werner Marld, *Kommentar zu den Liedern Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Alan Robertshaw. Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft. Germanistische Reihe, 52 (1926; Innsbruck: Institut für Germanistik, 1995), 201–02. Dirk Joschko, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: Eine Monographie zu Person, Werk und Forschungsgeschichte*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 396 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1985), 134, prudishly circumscribes the couple's activities as "Unterwasserspiele" (underwater games). A much more reasonable and realistic interpretation of this and similar poems by Oswald is now offered by Sieglinde Hartmann, "Oswald von Wolkenstein: Traditionen und Innovationen in seiner Lyrik," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 15 (2005): 349–72. See now the contribution to this volume by Rasma Lazda-Cazers.

The following song, "Ain graserin" (Kl 76), draws from the tradition of the *pastourelle* but personalizes it in a dramatic fashion.<sup>143</sup> There are very good reasons to assume that Oswald here also refers to himself and to his newly-wed wife, but the critical issue again proves to be the great interest to address sexual matters in a most direct manner. At first we learn that a young woman comes through the meadow with naked feet in order to cut the grass. The narrator expresses his delight about the sight of her, but his gaze is obviously directed at a lower level as he addresses his happiness about her "sichel brawn gehart" (3; her brown haired scythe). He is helping her, as he reports still in the first stanza, that he helped her to fix the fence, which reveals, however, very quickly its erotic meaning. In order to be ready for further help, the poet underscores:

mein häcklin klein hett ich ir vor  
 embor zu dienst gewetzet,  
 gehetztet, netzet; wie dem was,  
 schübren half ich ir das gras.  
 "zuck nicht, mein schatz!" "simm nain ich, lieber Jensel." (14–18)

[I had whetted my little ax  
 beforehand to make it rise, ready in service,  
 sharpened and lubricated it as well as possible,  
 then I helped her to push the grass together.  
 "Do not jerk, my treasure!" "Oh no, not at all, my dear John."]

Not enough, however, in the following stanza we are informed that the man, although he has already completed the task of cutting all the clover (or grass)—an obvious sexual metaphor—the maid is not happy with the end result and demands even further work from him: "dannocht gert si, das ich jät / noch ainmal inn der nidern peunt" (21–22; she required that I should cut the grass one more time on the lower meadow). As her reward for him she would make a wreath of roses (23–24), which he jubilantly welcomes, referring to the material as flax, a highly charged erotic symbolism.<sup>144</sup> Whereas usually we hear of women working with flax, here the poet implies his own genital, begging the woman to touch it: "'swenzel, renzel mir den flachs!'" (25; comb, and raise the flax for me). More

<sup>143</sup> Sabine Christiane Brinkmann, *Die deutschsprachige Pastourelle, 13.-16. Jahrhundert*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 307 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1986), 165–174, discusses a parallel song, "Ain jetterin" (Kl. 83), but her observations also apply to Kl. 76.

<sup>144</sup> Tomas Tomasek, "Die mittelhochdeutschen Lieder vom Flachsschwingen," *Lied im deutschen Mittelalter: Überlieferung, Typen, Gebrauch. Chiemsee-Colloquium 1991*, ed. Cyril Edwards, Ernst Hellgardt, and Norbert H. Ott (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996), 115–28. See also, from a folkloristic perspective, Alan Gailey, "Illustration of a Flax Clove, and a Description of Its Use," *Ulster Folklife* 33 (1987): 94–95.

specifically even: “‘treut in, wiltu, das er wachs!’” (26; treat it tenderly if you want that it grows!).<sup>145</sup>

In other songs, also drawing from traditional pastourelles, Oswald describes himself as a fox who is chasing after his lady and finally succeeds in gaining a close look at her private parts: “bis das ich ir die preun ermauss” (Kl. 83, 10; until I have hunted down the brown patch).<sup>146</sup>

Interestingly, as our earliest example, the poetry by the first troubadour, Guillaume le Neuf, had already indicated, it would be utterly erroneous to identify courtly love poetry, or love poetry at large, with esoteric, aesthetically pleasing, and morally impeccable literary expressions. Even when courtly poets resort to highly metaphorical language, the sexual content is never very far away and can be easily perceived. And in many cases we also know, if we can trust the results of more recent research, freed from the shackles of nineteenth-century moral limitations, even some of the most highly admired courtly love poets who seem to have been the upholders of public morality, also composed ribald, deftly erotic, even frivolous songs, such as Reinmar der Alte (late twelfth century).<sup>147</sup> Others, such as Neidhart (traditionally, though incorrectly identified as ‘Neidhart von Reuenthal,’ which is only his poetic mask), did not even continue with the pretense of courtly ideals and addressed the desire for sexual intercourse, sometimes by the young village lads, sometimes by their old mothers in a grotesque reversal of the discourse of sexuality, in most graphic, if not obscene, terms, particularly in his so-called “Sommerlieder” (Summer Songs), when lustfulness, erotic desire, lack of inhibition, and playfulness in open and warm nature dominate, such as in:

Er wolt sin messer in die scheide ( ) schieben;  
do begunde sich diu klinge biegen  
her wider reht gegen dem hefte.  
doch braht ers drin mit siner krefte.  
schier het er wider gezogen.  
es hab ein swercziu kra gelogen:

<sup>145</sup> Wolfgang von Kossack and Stefanie Stockhorst, “Sexuelles und wie es zu Wort kommt: die Frage nach dem Obszönen in den Liedern Oswalds von Wolkenstein,” *Daphnis* 28 (1999): 1-3.

<sup>146</sup> Wernfried Hofmeister, in his modern German translation, comments that both here and at other similar passages Oswald uses a “Dechiffrierungssignal” (a signal to decipher something): Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Sämtliche Lieder und Gedichte*. Ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt von Werner Hofmeister. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 511 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989), 226, note 242.

<sup>147</sup> Helmut Tervooren, *Reinmar-Studien: Ein Kommentar zu den “unechten” Liedern Reinmars des Alten* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1991), 68–81; Simon Gaunt, “A Martyr to Love: Sacrificial Desire in the Poetry of Bernart of Ventadorn,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 477–506.

wer solt des getruwen?  
 si sprach: "ziht wider, diu wurze ist noh niht gebruwen!"<sup>148</sup>

[He wanted to push his knife into the scabbard;  
 but the blade began to bend  
 and shrunk back to the handle.  
 Again, however, he pushed it in with all his might.  
 Then, one more time, he pulled it out of the scabbard.  
 A black crow would have lied [if it had been otherwise]:  
 Who should have believed it?  
 She said: "Pull it out again, the broth is not yet fully brewed!"]<sup>149</sup>

## 9. The Erotic, Sexuality, and the Pornographic?

This kind of language with its heavy use of erotic metaphors that make hardly any pretense to couch the specific sexual interest in poetic language found its continuation far into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as numerous examples in the various songbooks document.<sup>150</sup> Scholarship has tended to overlook deliberately or naively those songs, sometimes identified as "apocryphal folk songs."<sup>151</sup> But officials, authority figures, theologians, and other representatives of official culture have systematically tried to suppress these kinds of songs, denigrating them as immoral, lacking in any literary, or aesthetic quality,

<sup>148</sup> Quoted from Ulrich Müller, "Neidharts Pastourellen der 'Manessischen Handschrift': Uechechter 'Schmutz' oder die Kehrseite der Medaille?," *Entzauberung der Welt: Deutsche Literatur 1200–1500*, ed. James F. Poag and Thomas C. Fox (Tübingen: Francke, 1989), 73–88; here 77, stanza III. For further literature on this topic, see the references in Müller's study. As to 'obscene' literature in the Middle Ages, see Wolf-Dieter Stempel, "Mittelalterliche Obszönität als literarästhetisches Problem," *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste: Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen*, ed. Hans Robert Jauß. Poetik und Hermeneutik, 3 (Munich: Fink, 1968), 187–205.

<sup>149</sup> "Wurze" can mean both 'root' and 'sauce,' or 'broth.' See Müller, "Neidharts Pastourellen," 78, for a modern German translation. For a recent study of Neidhart's Summer Songs, see Jessika Warning, *Neidharts Sommerlieder. Überlieferungsvarianz und Autoridentität*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 132 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007). See my review, forthcoming in *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Volksliedarchivs*.

<sup>150</sup> See the example of Georg Forster's songbooks to which I have referred above; and again we need to keep in mind that the difference between Latin songs contained in the *Carmina Burana*, among others collections, and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century songbooks are actually surprisingly minimal. See, for example, Johann Ott, *Der 1. Teil. 121 neue Lieder von berühmten dieser Kunst gesetzt, lustig zu singen und auff allerley Instr[ument] dienstlich*. Nürnberg: Hieronymus Formschneider, 1534. Ex.: Staatsbibliothek Berlin, Mus. ant. pract. 0120. Songs no. 8, "Es was eins Pauren dochterlein," and no. 62, "Im Meyen," turn out to be explicitly, not at all veiled pornographic love song. I am presently preparing a monograph on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century songbooks.

<sup>151</sup> Ernst Klusen, "Das apokryphe Volkslied," *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung* 10 (1965): 85–102.

and as street songs not worthy enough for the morally upright individual who might enjoy singing folk songs.

Considering the numerous efforts particularly by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers, intellectuals, poets, collectors, theologians, and others to combat the threat of scandalously pornographic, or, as we would say, simply sexually explicit love poetry (see, for example, Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Peter Hebel), we gain a glimpse into the deep and continual tradition of such types of songs, hence also into the uninterrupted public discourse of sexuality openly displayed far beyond the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Hebel went so far to suggest in 1822 a kind of inquisitional institution to move energetically against such corrupting literary material with its allegedly devastating influence on people's morality.<sup>152</sup>

But these early-modern critics were by far not the first to argue with stern consternation against the debilitating effect of such erotic song poetry. Public statements by princes, governments, church authorities, and others embracing such serious moral attitudes against the open discussion and display of sexual matters within the framework of music, art, and literature can be detected already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1802 the Elector of Saxony, Frederick August issued the following order:

Nachdem Uns hinterbracht worden, daß mancherley ärgerliche und den guten Sitten zuwiderlaufende auch sonst besonders dem gemeinen Volke schädliche Lieder auf Aufsätze in den hiesigen Landen im Druck erschienen wären und auf Jahrmärkten zum freyen Verkauf ausgelegt würden; so hat die von Uns deshalb angeordnete Untersuchung nicht nur die Verbreitung solcher anstößigen Volksschriften durch sogenannte Liederhändler, Buchtrödler und Buchbinder auf den Stadt- und Dorfjahrmärkten bestätigt, sondern es sind auch die in der Beylage . . . verzeichneten für anstößig befundenen Lieder zu confisciren gewesen.<sup>153</sup>

[After we have learned that so many irritating, the good morals undermining songs and treatises, which otherwise threaten the common people in their ethical being, have appeared in print in our lands and have been offered freely for sale at the fairs, our investigating committee, which we have charged with this task, has confirmed not only the distribution of such objectionable popular texts by so-called song sellers, book sellers, and book binders on city and village markets, but has also confiscated such indecent songs, listed in the appendix.]

In many cases the moral argument turns out to be nothing but a cover for political reasons insofar as the authorities tried to defend themselves against rebellious,

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<sup>152</sup> Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, "Erotisches Lied," *Handbuch des Volksliedes*. Vol. I: *Die Gattungen des Volksliedes*, ed. id., Lutz Röhrich, and Wolfgang Suppan. Motive. Freiburger Folkloristische Forschungen, 1/1 (Munich: Fink, 1973), 575–615; here 577–79.

<sup>153</sup> Armin Tille, "Verzeichnis von 1802 konfiszierten Volksliedern," *Mitteilungen des Vereins für sächsische Volkskunde* III, 5 (1904): 133; here quoted from Brednich, "Erotisches Lied," 580.

liberal, if not democratic ideas, particularly shortly after the French Revolution. But many nineteenth-century self-declared propagandists for the preservation of public morality soon resorted to highly dubious comments about 'healthy' and 'sordid' songs, involuntarily indicating how much the theme of sexuality continued to be of utmost importance for the widest range of reading and listening audiences.<sup>154</sup>

Bawdy songs, in other words, as we might identify those by Guillaume IX, Neidhart, or Oswald von Wolkenstein, were continually appreciated and found imitators throughout the ages. The problem today, however, consists of the long-term impact which nineteenth-century folk song scholarship, astoundingly prudish in its approach to any poetic text that did not fit their narrow moral concepts and general idea about the human body and its public display, has had on our modern approach to this genre and to the general question concerning the cultural-historical significance of sexuality throughout times. G. Legman, for instance, comments about the utterly misleading impression which a naive reader might get of early-modern English folk poetry, as if there the theme of eroticism and sexuality had never existed: "the entire history of folksong publication in the English language is one of falsification and expurgation for the last two hundred years. . . . On the other hand, it is very important to remember that this has not had any effect on folksong. Only on the printed collections."<sup>155</sup> But the case of Georg Forster, a sixteenth-century medical doctor in Nuremberg and famous collector of popular songs, fully confirms as well that sexual themes were not at all taboo even among the intellectuals and the social elites within an urban setting.<sup>156</sup> Scraping

<sup>154</sup> Brednich, "Erotisches Lied," 582–83.

<sup>155</sup> G[ershon] Legman, "The Bawdy Song," id., *The Horn Book: Studies in Erotic Folklore and Bibliography* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1964), 336–426; here 342; see also Brednich, "Erotisches Lied," 584.

<sup>156</sup> Brednich, "Erotisches Lied," 585, laments that only very few early-modern songbooks truly contain veritable popular songs, hence also erotic songs. But this is not a problem of availability of songbooks; on the contrary, the number of printed sixteenth- and seventeenth-century songbooks is legion, we only need to rediscover them and acknowledge them as an important repository of the literature and music culture of their time; see *Deutsche Liebeslyrik im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert: 18. Mediävistisches Kolloquium des Zentrums für Mittelalterstudien der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg am 28. und 29. November 2003*, ed. Gert Hübner. Chloe, 37 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005); Albrecht Classen, "Lieddichtung und Liederbücher im deutschen Spätmittelalter," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 12 (2000): 217–228; id., "Die historische Entwicklung eines literarischen Sammlungstypus: Das Liederbuch vom 14. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert—von der Weingartner Liederhandschrift bis zum Venus-Gärtlein," "daß gepflegt werde der feste Buchstab. Festschrift Heinz Rölleke zum 65. Geburtstag am 6. November 2001, ed. Achim Hölter and Blum, Lothar (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2001), 26–40; id., "Georg Forsters Liederbücher: Letzte Blüte und Ausklang einer Epoche. Rezeptionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum spätmittelalterlichen Lied," *Lied und populäre Kultur / Song and Popular Culture: Jahrbuch des Deutschen Volksliedarchivs* 48 (2003): 11–47. For a music-historical perspective, see Rolf Caspari, *Liedtradition im Stilwandel um 1600: Das Nachleben des deutschen Tenorliedes in den gedruckten*

simply at the surface, as many anthropologists and ethnologists, apart from musicologists and few cultural historians have done, we quickly discover a huge corpus of highly erotic, sexually most explicit poetry, songs, narratives, but also imagery and other visual representations throughout times, irrespective of any religious and political developments.

Specialized research has uncovered comparable phenomena among the South Slavs as well as among the Hungarians, the Austrians, Sicilians, and so forth, and this throughout times. Dictionaries for the erotic vocabulary, for instance in Latin and French, exist, such as P. Pierrugues's *Glossarium eroticum linguae latinae: sive Theogoniae, legum et morum nuptialium apud Romanos explanatio nova ex interpretatione propria et impropria et differentiis in significato fere duorum millium sermonum, ad intelligentiam poetarum et ethologorum tam antiquae quam integrae infimaeque latinitatis*,<sup>157</sup> or Pierre Nicolas Blondeau's, François Noël's, and Alcide Bonneau's *Dictionnaire érotique latin-français*.<sup>158</sup> Gordon Williams published a dictionary of sexual and erotic terms in Shakespeare's works and in contemporary Stuart literature,<sup>159</sup> and John Stephen Farmer focused on *Vocabula amatoria* in the works of French masterpieces from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century.<sup>160</sup> The list of similar lexicographical research could be easily extended, though not every major European language is well represented in this area.<sup>161</sup> Previous scholars who tried to create a serious publication forum for research into this area, however, quickly faced serious criticism and aggressive opposition, extending to open

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*Liedersammlungen von Le Maistre (1566) bis Schein (1626)*. Schriften zur Musik, 13 (Munich: Musikverlag Katzbichler, 1971).

<sup>157</sup> (Paris: A. F. et P. Dondey-Dupré, 1826; reprinted by various publishers throughout Europe, in 1908, 1911, 1932, and 1965).

<sup>158</sup> (Paris: I. Liseaux, 1885).

<sup>159</sup> *Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone Press, 1994); see also Eric Patridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969); Thomas W. Ross, "'The Safety of a Pure Blush': Shakespeare's Bawdy Cluster," *Shakespeare Studies* 12 (1979): 267–80; Timothy Billings, "Two New Sources for Shakespeare's Bawdy French in Henry V," *Notes and Queries* 52, 2 (2005): 202–04.

<sup>160</sup> *Vocabula amatoria: a French-English Glossary of Words, Phrases, and Allusions Occurring in the Works of Rabelais, Voltaire, Molière, Rousseau, Béranger, Zola, and Others, with English Equivalents and Synonyms* (1896; [New York]: University Books, 1966). See also Valter Boggione and Giovanni Casalegno, *Dizionario storico del lessico erotico italiano: metafore, eufemismi, oscenità, doppi sensi, parole dotte e parole basse in otto secoli di letteratura italiana* (Milan: Longanesi, 1996; rpt. by other publishers in 1999, 2000, and 2004).

<sup>161</sup> Karl Reiskel, "Idioticon viennense eroticum," *Anthrophophyteia: Jahrbücher für Folkloristische Erhebungen und Forschungen zur Entwicklung der geschlechtlichen Moral*, ed. Friedrich S. Krauss. Vol. II (Leipzig: Deutsche Verlagsactiengesellschaft, 1905), 1–13. This is a rather rare item, especially in European libraries, and then, if it is available, it is regularly kept in a locked space, accessible only to individual researchers (as in the case of the University of Freiburg, Germany, Dept. of Ethnology). These rather bold and entirely uninhibited yearbooks are considerably more easily available all over North America.



hatred and hostility, as the vehement reactions to the publication of Austrian erotic folk songs by Emil Karl Blümml in 1907 indicate.<sup>162</sup>

Surprisingly, these allegedly 'pornographic' songs against which modern audiences rally with anger and indignation often date from much earlier centuries and had been preserved in respectable collections created for high-ranking collectors and patrons of the arts, which provides solid evidence for the considerable longevity of erotic and sexually explicit literature and visual art throughout time.<sup>163</sup> A remarkable example can be found in the so-called *Hebräisches Liederbuch* (*Hebrew Songbook*) from ca. 1600, compiled in Worms, perhaps by the school master Eisak Wallich Wirmeißen. This songbook, like so many other early-modern texts pertaining to the history of Yiddish literature, was written in Hebrew letters, but these simply transcribe the Yiddish text. In "Einesmal das ich lust bekam" (no. 3; Once When I Felt Interested), a young woman expresses her wish to woo a man and to marry him, and the content of the sixteen stanzas clearly indicates that she would like to sleep with him. Sometimes the female voice formulates her erotic desire more clearly than at other passages, but the entire song still remains on a relatively harmless level, without any specific references to the sexual act.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, the original editor deliberately excised most of the stanzas and only allowed four of them to enter his collection, obviously out of embarrassment that a female poet/voice could openly indicate her interest in a sexual relationship with a man. Officially, however, he justifies his censorship with a reference to the poem's "Weitschweifigkeit" (verbosity) and its lack of literary quality. At the same time, he cannot avoid specifying what keeps the young woman from finding sleep at night: "Sie wird Tag und Nach von wollüstigen Gedanken geplagt" (She is tortured day and night by voluptuous thoughts).<sup>165</sup>

Let us take a look at a perhaps typically, certainly most important sixteenth-century French example, the *Heptaméron* by Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), which she composed in clear imitation of, if not competition with, Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ca. 1350).<sup>166</sup> Her collection of tales, relying on a fairly similar concept

<sup>162</sup> Ferdinand Bilger, "Einige Urteile über Blümmls schriftstellerische Arbeiten," *Das deutsche Volkslied* 13 (1911): 35–36, 54–56, 75–76; Alfred von Klement, *Emil Karl Blümml: Leben und Werke des Sammlers des deutschen Volksliedes* (Prague: Calve, 1940); for a summary, see Brednich, "Erotisches Lied," 587–89.

<sup>163</sup> Brednich, "Erotisches Lied," 591–614.

<sup>164</sup> For an edition, see *Deutsche Frauenlieder des fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhunderts: Authentische Stimmen in der deutschen Frauenliteratur der Frühneuzeit oder Vertreter einer poetischen Gattung (das "Frauenlied")?* Einleitung, Edition und Kommentar von Albrecht Classen. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 136 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), 130–33; see also id., *Deutsche Liederbücher*, 199–200.

<sup>165</sup> Felix Rosenberg, "Ueber eine Sammlung deutscher Volks- und Gesellschaftslieder in hebräischen Lettern," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland* 2 (1888): 232–95; here 251. This was his doctoral thesis.

<sup>166</sup> Marguerite d'Angoulême, *L'Heptaméron des nouvelles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon. 4 vols. (Paris:

as in the latter's work, was first printed in 1558 as *Histoires des Amans fortunez*, edited by the Humanist Pierre Boaistuau. Only the edition published the following year by Pierre Gruget established the title of the work under which it has been known ever since. The story-telling takes place in a mountainous abbey in the Pyrenees after torrential rains have forced a company of women and men to abandon the spa town of Cauterets. Contrary to the set-up in the *Decameron*, the company finds an elderly lady amidst them, Oisille, who is chosen as their spiritual leader. She injects a strong religious note into their entertainment, assembling all every morning at silent reading and then at mass.<sup>167</sup>

Many of these stories deal directly with sex, but it is presented in an entirely different context. As P. A. Chilton observes, "where characters do find enjoyment, it is accidental . . . or furtive and hypocritical . . . or tragically revenged . . . or guilt-ridden and roundly condemned . . ."<sup>168</sup> Moreover, sex is here regularly connected with rape which occurs because of social conflicts between potential or unlikely lovers. Some men among the company advocate rape "in order to avert the threat to a gentleman's honour posed by resistance to seduction."<sup>169</sup> In other words, as the female perspective clearly underscores, sexual perpetration by the males is an important theme, but it is not viewed mildly or even positively. On the contrary, both the female protagonists and the female story tellers radically fight against women's violation, though the sexual itself still remains a major theme throughout. Marguerite has her narrators report about Franciscan monks who try to rape a boatswoman (I, 5), about unwelcome advances by a lover (I, 10), about a prior who sexually harasses a nun (III, 22), about a secretary who abuses his host's hospitality to seek sexual favor from the wife, only to be tricked and refuted by her (III, 27), and so forth. Sometimes we are also told about grotesque aberrations by a lover who commits numerous transgressions of incest, such as in the thirtieth story related on the third day. The details are of particular interest to us, so a brief summary would be appropriate here:

A young widow with a child decides to refrain from remarriage and dedicates her life to religion. Her son is being taught by a devout and highly moral tutor, but

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Auguste Eudes, 1880). For a surprisingly good introduction to Marguerite's life and work, see online at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marguerite\\_of\\_Navarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marguerite_of_Navarre) (last accessed on April 13, 2007); and Paula Sommers, "Marguerite de Navarre (Marguerite d'Angoulême, Queen of Navarre)," *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson. Vol. 2 (New York and London: Garland, 1991), 903–05 (with extensive bibliography). See also the collection of articles illustrating pedagogical approaches to her work, *Approaches to Teaching Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron*, ed. Colette H. Winn. Approaches to Teaching World Literature, 95 (New York: Modern Language Association, 2007).

<sup>167</sup> Marguerite de Navarre, *The Heptameron*, trans. with an introd. P. A. Chilton (1984; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986).

<sup>168</sup> Chilton, "Introduction," 14–15.

<sup>169</sup> Chilton, "Introduction," 15.

when the young man has reached the age of fourteen, he falls in love with one of his mother's ladies-in-waiting. The latter complains about these advances to the widow, who first is highly resistant to believing her out of deep love for her son. Finally, she agrees to test the claim and instructs the young woman to invite her son to a secret meeting. However, the mother takes the maid's place in bed, thinking that she would be able to chastise her son, if he were to arrive, indeed, harshly. To her surprise, the son arrives in fact, but the mother does not utter a word, "waiting till he gave some clear sign that his intentions were bad, for she could not believe on such slender evidence that his desires might go as far as anything criminal" (318). The situation develops as to be expected; as soon as the young man has begun to caress her, the mother's female nature responds, and since she had repressed all sexual desires until then after her husband's death, she is suddenly overwhelmed and "swept away to the bottom [of her chastity]" (318). Not surprisingly, this first sexual union immediately impregnates her, and she quickly realizes that she has committed incest, quite apart from her distress over having broken all her vows of chastity.

Remarkably, the narrator critically comments on the mother's subsequent behavior, since she refuses to comprehend the nature of her own self and the overarching power of sexuality: "Yet, instead of humbling herself and recognizing how impossible it is for our flesh to do otherwise than sin unless we have God's help, she tried to give satisfaction for past deeds through her own means . . ." (318). Instead of trying to come to terms with her sin and to confess it to God, she sends her son away, and, nine months later, secretly delivers a baby girl in her brother's house. Years later, her son wants to return and visit his mother, but she insists that he can only come back into her presence if he is married. The tragic plot now thickens because the girl, sent away to the service of Catherine, the Queen of Navarre, has grown up and turned into a stunning beauty, and it is she whom the son then takes as his wife.

The narrative concludes with the mother asking for advice from the Church, and is told that her two children have sinned in innocence, hence would not be guilty, whereas she herself would have to do penance for the rest of her life. Without any sense of the true extent of transgression involving the two young people, we are told: "Never was there such love between husband and wife, never were a husband and wife so close. For she was his daughter, his sister, his wife. And he was her father, brother and husband. They endured for ever in this great love . . ." (321).

The true fascination with Marguerite's *Heptaméron*, however, rests in the subsequent discussions among the story-tellers. Whereas the old, religious lady Oisille only comments that each person should entirely submit under God, and whereas some of the other female narrators confirm this theological reading, another one, Longarine, compares the account with what she has heard of common practices among the Franciscans who test their own spiritual strength

and chastity by meeting women and engaging in erotic exchanges: "Then by means of fondling and kissing they test themselves to see if they have achieved mortification of the flesh. If they find that they are aroused by these little pleasures, they go into solitude and subject themselves to fast and austere disciplines" (322). After having retreated and cooled off, so to speak, however, they return to the old practice and even take the next step, lying down in bed with a woman to see whether they can repress their lustfulness—in close parallel to the mother's approach within the narrative. But Longarine adds the revealing comment: "However, for every one who survived this test, there were many who did not, and the consequences were so unfortunate that the Archbishop of Milan . . . was obliged to separate the men from the women" (322). As Elizabeth C. Zegura poignantly observes, "the entire tenor of this transgressive work—which refuses to place male discourse in a privileged position and deconstructs orthodox models of love and marriage—seems to clash with the piety and sobriety of Marguerite's religious poetry."<sup>170</sup>

The satire directed against the Franciscans in their hypocritical approach to sexuality, and their preposterous stance regarding chastity and subsequent Christian morality is an additional component in the long-term public discourse of sexuality, always vacillating between approval and rejection, between hostility and total approval, between critical perception and subtle approval.<sup>171</sup> Whereas Geburon, another narrator, underscores the folly of putting "oneself through one's own efforts above sin, and then actually to go looking for situations where a sin may be committed" (322), Saffredent adds that even the best efforts to avoid the temptation by concupiscence might be futile because of its overarching impact on people of all ages, social classes, and status in life. The reference to Saint Jerome illustrates this thoroughly, shedding significant light on the realization of how much human life is determined by sexuality: "The good Saint Jerome, even after he had flagellated himself and hidden himself away in the wilderness, confessed that he could not get rid of the fire that burned in the marrow of his bones" (322).

In fact, as the sudden interjection by Hircan indicates, their highly lustful, if not frivolous, story telling and subsequent discourse about the most egregious transgressions of morality and ethics in human life because of the temptation of sexuality has attracted the monks of the monastery where the company had found

<sup>170</sup> Elizabeth C. Zegura, "True Stories and Alternative Discourses: The Game of Love in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, 351–68; here 352. See also Lucien Paul Victor Febvre, *Amour sacré, amour profane; autour de l'Heptaméron*. Collection Idées, 235 (1944; Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

<sup>171</sup> See also, despite his focus on the lyrical genre, Klaus W. Hempfer, "Intertextualität, Systemreferenz und Strukturwandel: Die Pluralisierung des erotischen Diskurses in der italienischen und französischen Renaissance-Lyrik (Ariost, Bembo, Du Bellay, Ronsard)," *Modelle des literarischen Strukturwandels*, ed. Michael Tizmann. Studien und Texte zur Sozialgeschichte der Literatur, 33 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 7–43.

refuge: "They didn't even hear the bell for vespers, but now that we've started talking about God they've run off and they're ringing the second bell!"<sup>172</sup> Sexuality, in other words, permeates every level of human society, and Marguerite demonstrates through her incredibly rich tapestry of narrative accounts the supreme importance which this force in human life actually plays, whether it is connected with violence or simple love, whether it leads to deviation and transgression or to marriage and pregnancy.

Certainly, the *Heptaméron* reflects a remarkable opposition to the lackadaisical approach to human sexuality, as commonly expressed in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but Marguerite nevertheless, despite her overall concern for women's well-being, harbors no reluctance to deal with basic sexual desires throughout her volume and specifically addresses problems resulting from uninhibited sexual lust, primarily on the part of the male protagonists.<sup>173</sup> Despite a certain bitterness that permeates the entire collection, concerning the relationship between the genders and the dangers for lovers, if they don't turn into the worst enemies against each other,<sup>174</sup> the body, in all of its nakedness and in its sexual functions, lies bare, wherever we turn. As Robert D. Cottrell calls it, "Human beings, then, are 'naturally' sinful. The *Heptameron* is a record of human sinfulness writ large enough for all to see." And: "Like the human creature whose body registers visible signs of the Fall, the *Heptameron* is a script across whose surface are inscribed the signs of sin rendered legible."<sup>175</sup>

We might have to agree with Franz X. Eder that the intensified theological debate in the sixteenth century also established numerous layers of new legal processes, rules, institutions, and enforcement methods to suppress the unruly

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<sup>172</sup> The anticlerical strategy here is obvious, and finds countless parallels in late-medieval and Renaissance literature, see *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman. *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, LI (Leiden, New York, and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1993), 29–30, 69, 97, 99, 192–93, 201, 205–52, et passim. For a literary treatment of this topic, see Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte: Geistliche in den Mären des deutschen Mittelalters*. Braunschweiger Beiträge zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 2 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1999).

<sup>173</sup> Nicole Cazauran, *L'Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre* (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieure, 1976), 150: "De tels développements ne sauraient être matière à rire dans l'*Heptaméron* et ils ne trouvent pas davantage place dans les histoires piteuses, car ils susciteraient aussitôt la plus sévère réprobation à l'égard de celles qui tiendraient ces propos. Il est très rare même que soient évoqués les plaisirs d'un couple sans que quelque trait vienne éclairer la 'folie' de ces amours, éphémères autant que nocives . . ." Further: "en même temps qu'elle en voit et qu'elle en montre lucidement les séduction, elle invite à se défier de ses excès qui ruinent le corps et qui s'emparent de tout l'être . . ." (151).

<sup>174</sup> Robert D. Cottrell, "Inmost Cravings: The Logic of Desire in the *Heptameron*," *Critical Tales: New Studies of the Heptameron and Early Modern Culture*, ed. John D. Lyons and Mary B. McKinley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 3–24; here 9.

<sup>175</sup> Cottrell, "Inmost Cravings," 5 and 6.

sexual desire and to relegate it into the exclusively private sphere of marriage.<sup>176</sup> Moreover, both the clerical and the secular authorities increasingly discovered the powerful and also devastating rhetorical strategy to accuse unruly women, women of threatening position, suspicious women, and many others simply of witchcraft. There were many reasons why this witch craze developed and quickly expanded to such enormous proportions, especially in German-speaking lands. But we can be certain that the fear of uncontrolled sexuality, of loss of fertility, and hence also of rebellious womanhood was one of the driving forces,<sup>177</sup> perhaps especially because the public discourse about sexuality had gained such prominence and was no longer fully controllable. The combination of a systematic enforcement of new marriage laws, ethics, and morals, on the one hand, and of an increasingly brutal and painful persecution of alleged witches proved to be powerful tools in the hands of the authorities. However, the continued tradition of highly erotic literature even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries speaks a different language. In fact, we might argue that both sides were complementary to each other.

One of the male story-tellers in Marguerite's *Heptaméron* relates an account that indicates how much sexuality in all of its possible variations and transgressive configurations continued to exert profound interest throughout the entire period, as closely reflected by the popular songs discussed above. In the forty-fifth story we hear of a quick-witted and devious tapestry-maker who, though deaf, knows exceedingly well how to manipulate his social environment, especially his wife because she proves to be a simple-minded person with little ability or interest in being cunning or crafty. The husband cares little about marital fidelity and sleeps with many women in his neighborhood, which the narrator, Simontaut, indicates through an ironic comment: "he was a charitable man as well as being an affectionate husband—so charitable that he quite often donated to his neighbours' wives what rightfully belonged to his own, though he was always as discreet as could be about it" (401).

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<sup>176</sup> Franz X. Eder, *Kultur der Begierde*, 52–62; see also the excellent survey article by Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "Reformation Society, Women and the Family," *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 433–60. This was also a major topic among theologians and other intellectuals both on the Protestant and the Catholic side, see Albrecht Classen, *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum frühen 17. Jahrhundert*, 108–256.

<sup>177</sup> Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 82–103. See also Gerhild Scholz Williams, *Defining Dominion: The Discourses of Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern France and Germany*. *Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Civilization* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 65–87. For a more traditional approach to witch craze, see Rainer Decker, *Die Päpstin und die Hexen: Aus den geheimen Akten der Inquisition* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2003), and the excellent contributions to *Ketzer, Zauberer, Hexen: Die Anfänge der europäischen Hexenverfolgungen*, ed. Andreas Blauert. edition suhrkamp: Neue Folge, 577 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990).

One day he becomes enamored with one of the chambermaids and plans to rape her, and this actually with the official approval of his ignorant wife. He convinces her that the chambermaid would deserve a sound beating for her laziness, and that the best time to do so would be on the feast day of the Holy Innocents.<sup>178</sup> His wife agrees with his plan and fully believes that he is really preparing himself for this punishment because he procures some scary-looking canes and has them hardened in brine—obviously a pornographic allusion. On the specific morning he climbs up to the attic where the chambermaid is sleeping and rapes her. No one comes to her rescue because the wife assumes that the young woman is screaming out of pain from being whipped. Worse even, after the husband has left the house the maid throws herself at her mistress's feet, begging for her protection, but the chambermaid has to hear from her: "'I've been asking him to do it for over a month now. And if it hurt, I'm very pleased. He's not given you half what he ought!'" (402).

Soon enough, the husband realizes that his strategy has worked to his fullest satisfaction, and since the young maid does no longer object to him, he regularly enjoys love-making with her: "she no longer wept when he 'performed the Innocents' with her" (402). Early one morning in winter when snow has fallen they both engage in sex with each outside in the garden, and they are observed by a neighbor woman. The tapestry-maker, however, notices her and immediately develops a counter-strategy, taking his wife out into the garden as well, performing exactly the same way with her as with the maid, throwing snowballs at each other and to "'give [ her] the Innocents'" (403). When the neighbor then tries to alert the wife to her husband's adultery, she only laughs at her face and repeatedly insists that it had been herself and that the neighbor simply did not look at them correctly. Significantly, for our discussion, the neighbor describes in greatest detail what she saw the tapestry-maker and the girl perform: "'and then he put his hand in her bosom, and then somewhere else, as intimate as they possibly could be!'" (403). There is practically nothing left for the erotic mind to imagine, as the account takes us to the most intimate part of the female body, very similar as in the notorious drawing accompanying the allegorical verse romance by the Constance lawyer Heinrich Wittenwiler, *The Ring* (ca. 1400), in which the male wooer touches the area of his fiancée's vagina, though she is still fully dressed.<sup>179</sup> Not at all distressed by this attempt to embarrass, or to enrage her, the

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<sup>178</sup> As P. A. Chilton, trans., comments in a footnote, 401, "It was also a feast of fools and in sixteenth-century France had become a notorious excuse for sexual pranks."

<sup>179</sup> Heinrich Wittenwiler, *Der Ring*. Frühneuhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch. Nach dem Text von Edmund Wießner ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt und herausgegeben von Horst Brunner. Durchgesehene und bibliographisch ergänzte Ausgabe (1991; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999); see also the edition, trans. and commentary by Bernhard Sowinski. Helfant Texte, T 9 (Stuttgart: helfant, 1988), 1, with a full-size reproduction of the first folio containing the image of the peasant couple

wife only giggles and admits that she had enjoyed all these erotic pleasures herself, so the neighbor's efforts to express her moral concerns and to warn the wife about the husband's infidelity utterly fail: "'I saw them afterwards on the snow doing things that didn't seem either very nice or very respectable to me!'" (403). But since the wife does not see through her husband's strategy and happily remembers the sexual games her husband had played with her, she refutes all accusations and even insists that the neighbor's recriminations are inappropriate in this situation: "'That's what we do in private, my good husband and myself. There's no need to be so shocked. You know that wives have to humour their husbands'" (404). In fact, the neighbor has to recognize at the end that marital sex, even if performed in public view, represents a joyful activity, and she ruefully reflects upon her own husband's lack of sexual interest, at least in contrast to the romping and most youthful tapestry-maker.

As scholars have repeatedly commented, the ensuing discussion among the company proves to be as important as the story itself, a basic observation relevant for a comprehensive understanding of the *Heptaméron* at large. Sexuality and love immediately become the focal point of the debate since the narrator himself argues that the account simply illustrates "that there is as much wickedness in you [women] as there is in men" (404). On the other hand, Parlamente laments that from her perspective the husband "'was an extremely bad character . . . because he deceived both his wife *and* the chambermaid'" (404). Hircan, from his male point of view, however, argues that "'the man satisfied them both in one morning! I think that he showed great prowess, both mentally and physically'" (404). Parlament retorts that for her the husband acted most reprehensibly, constantly operating with lies, deceiving his wife and pandering "to the immorality of the other with vice" (404). This forces Hircan, her husband, to retract somewhat, but the discussion continues, as the entire collection of novellas invites broad, dialectical, conflictual explorations of the meanings of love and sexuality, with the representatives of both genders pursuing opposite perspectives. In Jules Gelernt's words,

Marguerite is not particularly interested in the casuistry of love, nor is she particularly concerned with its passionate aspect; what does hold her attention is its manifestation as action in society—the behavior of men and women acting under the

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in amorous, if not rather sexual embrace, which also could be read as a deftly pornographic depiction of the type of love peasants were allegedly capable of pursuing, ignorant of the refined courtly love. For an online copy, see <http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/ndm/materialien/wittenwiler.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/ndm/materialien/ring.htm&h=762&w=560&sz=93&hl=en&start=1&um=1&tbnid=ccqgYd5uziLC5M:&tbnh=142&tbnw=104&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dwittenwiler%26svnum%3D10%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26rls%3DGGIHH,GGIH:2007-14,GGIH:en%26sa%3DN> (last accessed on March 31, 2008).



compulsion of erotic drives, and the consequences of that behavior. It is thus a real psycho-social investigation of the nature of love that is set in motion by the Queen of Navarre's interlocutors, and its purpose is to come to grips with the paradoxical nature of this passion which can be at once cohesive and disruptive.<sup>180</sup>

In fact, the remarkable tensions over the proper interpretation of each individual account in the *Heptaméron* that result among the mixed audience within the literary framework indicate how much the poet has captured, and also happily embraced, the "*scala d'amore*, which ranges from sensual appetite to adoration of the divine, measures the interaction of men and women who seek happiness in one another; the idealism of the spirit tries to make peace with the reality of the flesh."<sup>181</sup> Although the company focuses its discussion on love, especially within marriage, on tragic constellations, and individual suffering, the actual content of the novella illustrates the very opposite, with its supreme interest in free enjoyment of sexuality, even in full view of the public which, here represented by the neighbor woman, despite the moral argument, reveals its unbridled fascination with and lust for full physical pleasures. This sexual interest could also easily swap over to the reversal of gender roles and the exploration of homosexuality, and all this in a rather open-minded, ludic manner, allowing sexuality as such to assume a most significant public function.<sup>182</sup>

However, we should not forget that the entire discourse, as projected by Marguerite de Navarre, is predicated on the use of two very distinct genders, male and female, and each narrative told by a male displays certainly different gender features, especially with regard to the evaluation of sexuality.<sup>183</sup> Nevertheless, both sides frankly and unhesitatingly plunge into the topic of sex with all its sordid, violent, exhilarating, facetious, and also loving properties. This finds an excellent illustration in the forty-sixth narrative, told by the old and highly religious lady,

<sup>180</sup> Jules Gelernt, *World of Many Loves: The Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre*. University of North Carolina Studies in Comparative Literature, 38 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 63–64.

<sup>181</sup> Gelernt, *World of Many Loves*, 65. Zegura, "True Stories and Alternative Discourses," 359, identifies this phenomenon as "Marguerite's ludic experiment in plurality [that] yields discourses as diverse as the characters involved."

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, Gary Ferguson, "History of Her Story? (Homo)sociality/sexuality in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* 12," *Narrative Worlds: Essays on the Nouvelle in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century France*, ed. id. and David Laguardia. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 285 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 97–122.

<sup>183</sup> See now Raymond Cormier, "À propos de Lavine amoureuse: le Savoir sentimental féminin et cognitif," *Bien dire et bien apprendre*. Numéro spécial: *Réception et représentation de l'Antiquité: actes du colloque du Centre d'Etudes Médiévales et Dialectales*, ed. Aimé Petit. *Revue Médiévisique* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Université Charles-de-Gaulle, Lille 3,) 24 (2006): 57–70; id. "Woman's Way of Feeling: Lavinia's Innovative Discourse of/on/about Love in the Roman d'Eneas," *Words of Love and Love of Words*, 111–27. See also the various contributions to *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida, 1996).

Oisille, who, however, does not see anything wrong with relating how a Franciscan friar tried to rape a judge's wife, but is kicked down the staircase by him (406). Undaunted by this misfortune, the monk soon finds another victim, this time the young daughter of a lady who is filled with a strong liking for his order. Believing his words that he would give the girl a good lesson regarding staying in bed and missing his sermons, he simply proceeds to rape her, while the mother even believes that the girl's screams are only the result of his physical punishment. Whereas Simontaut (male) entertains the company with a very parallel story also involving rape, and approvingly describes how the tapestry-maker gains access to the chambermaid and how the latter eventually accepts him and even begins to enjoy their sexual unions, Oisille evaluates the event in her account very differently: "When the friar had satisfied his evil desire . . . The girl's mother thanked him and went upstairs to her daughter, who was greatly distressed, as well she might be, after being the victim of such a crime" (407). There are no further consequences because the friar quickly disappears, fully aware of the misdeed and the threat of legal prosecution.

Again, the really interesting aspect proves to be the debate among the teller and her listeners who exchange their opinions about who should be entitled to carry out any kind of physical punishment (men to men, women to women), about foolish mothers and wives, hypocritical clerics, the need to be circumspect in all walks of life, to avoid being duped and deceived, and so forth. All this occurs, however, in clear light of the basic theme of sexuality which serves as the discursive foundation for the exploration of gender relationships, conflicts between marriage partners, and of the appropriate behavior of monks and other clerics.

In fact, the careful analysis of the overall design of the *Heptaméron* would quickly reveal that religious, moral, and ethical issues are intimately tied in with aspects pertaining to eroticism, sexuality, marriage, rape, and other types of violence. In order to establish relevant narrative material to explore the more abstract issues, the story-tellers regularly resort to basic problems involving sex and violence. In other words, sexuality, as explored in this sixteenth-century text, very comparable to early-modern literature at large, proves to be the catalyst for wider epistemological questions. The sexual body surfaces regularly and demands its place within society, and we would be hard pressed to identify the demarcation line in the historical-cultural development between the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age.

## 10. The Enjoyment of the Body in Its Sexual Function—Or: Sexuality as a Basis for Public Discourse on Ethics, Morality, and Reason

The earliest *troubadour*, Guillaume le Neuf, had likewise smiled about his own frolicking and romping with the two ladies, fully cognizant of the transgressive nature of their activities, as Oswald von Wolkenstein later did when he composed his most sexually graphical marital songs, and as Marguerite de Navarre does when she has her narrators discuss the value and danger of, problems with, and importance of sexuality within human society. We could also include numerous Shakespeare plays and many others composed by his contemporaries in England, France, and Spain, where poetics of sexuality either bluntly or subtly are deftly at work and deeply determine the essential background.<sup>184</sup>

A brief reflection on the works by the late-medieval papal secretary and humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) will allow us to round off our observations so far. In his Latin *Liber facetiorum*, composed between 1433 and 1452, when it was rearranged for publication, and translated into many languages, and printed throughout all the following centuries, the author subscribes to a surprisingly open attitude toward sexuality and plays with countless sexual allusions that might leave even some modern readers breathless.<sup>185</sup> Bernhard J. Hurwood certainly captured some of the key points of this collection, emphasizing: “While many of the tales had no moral at all, and were merely calculated to win the biggest laugh of the evening, some had very penetrating morals. What all had in common, however, was a concern with basic human shortcomings—plus absolute impiety and utter cynicism.”<sup>186</sup> But he also added the curious comment, not atypical of modern opinions about the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance: “All of them bear testimony that the *quattrocento* was in some ways an age of freer expression than our own. Nothing was sacred as long as the point of the story was made. Such uninhibited lack of restraint, especially in regard to bodily functions, sexual and otherwise, provoked bitter attacks in later, less tolerant times.”<sup>187</sup>

First, it would be highly doubtful, especially in light of our previous investigations, that the fifteenth century could be singled out like that, contrasting

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<sup>184</sup> See the contributions to *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>185</sup> Poggio Bracciolini, *Facezie*, con un saggio di Eugenio Garin, introd., trad. e note di Marcello Ciccuto, testo latino a fronte (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1983); *The Facetiae of Giovanni Francesco Poggio Bracciolini*, trans. Bernhard J. Hurwood (New York and London: Award Books, Tandem Books, 1968); see also *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen, 575–81.

<sup>186</sup> Hurwood, “Preface,” 18–19.

<sup>187</sup> Hurwood, “Preface,” 19.

it with earlier and later centuries, or epochs.<sup>188</sup> In fact, in light of the history of sexuality (to which now could also be added the history of scatology), at least here seen through the lens of the literary products, the far-reaching interest in and fascination with sexuality never seems to have faded, not in the late Middle Ages nor in the Renaissance and the Reformation.<sup>189</sup> Second, Poggio's *Facetiae* experienced an enormous popularity, first in manuscript format, then in print format. The first printed edition appeared in 1470, and almost every year since until today, excepting a few brief periods when the book market did not witness a new version or translation.<sup>190</sup> Certainly, the *Facetiae* were placed on the *Index Expurgatorius* at the Council of Trent in 1545, but this did not diminish the public's great demand, which in turn motivated book printers to produce ever new volumes with Poggio Bracciolini's tales. The comments by readers and critics throughout the ages vary considerably, but they all indicate, whether approvingly or in opposition, that they took note of these extraordinarily witty tales, however erotic or obscene they might appear at times.<sup>191</sup>

Poggio himself defended his *Facetiae* against all kinds of cavilers who do not fully understand the true purpose of his "confabulations," which they deem to be "insubstantial things, unworthy of a serious man."<sup>192</sup> But he defends himself with a reference to the model that he followed, the ancients, "who were very prudent and learned and who delighted in witticisms, jests, and stories, deserved not censure but praise" (577). Moreover, according to his opinion—which would be fully shared by Boccaccio who expressed himself quite similarly in the prologue to his *Decameron*<sup>193</sup>—everyone deeply engaged in intellectual activities requires

<sup>188</sup> This was, however, a favorite practice until the late twentieth century; see, for instance, the seminal study by [Johan] Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (1919; Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), 9: "To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us."

<sup>189</sup> Barbara C. Bowen, "The 'Honorable Art of Farting' in Continental Renaissance Literature," *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art: Studies in Scatology*, ed. Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim. *Studies in European Cultural Transition*, 21 (Aldershot, Hampshire, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 1–13.

<sup>190</sup> Cicutto, "Introduzione," 51–55.

<sup>191</sup> Cicutto, "Giudizi critici," 69–77; see also Lionello Sozzi, "Le 'Facezie' e la loro fortuna europea," *Journal de la Renaissance* 1 (2000): 89–102.

<sup>192</sup> Quoted from *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, 576 (this is borrowed from Joseph S. Salemi, "Selections from the *Facetiae* of Poggio Bracciolini," *Allegorica* 8, 1–2 [1983]: 77–183). For the original, see Cicutto, ed., 108. Hurwood, trans., does not include the prologue.

<sup>193</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Richard Aldington (1930; New York: Dell Publishing, 1970), 26, referring to his female audience, underscores: "Now if the melancholy born of fierce desire should enter their minds, they must be forced to remain in sadness unless it is driven away by new discourse; moreover, they have much less endurance than men . . . As an aid and comfort to women in love . . . I intend to relate one hundred tales . . . In these tales will be seen the gay and sad adventures of lovers and other happenings both of ancient and modern times."

some relaxation from time to time: "It is a proper and almost necessary thing, indeed commended by the wise, that our minds, oppressed with various concerns and troubles, be relieved on occasion from cares and be diverted towards mirth and relaxation by sort of amusement" (577). He desires to select his own audience and appeals to those whom he calls "witty and humane men" (577). Not surprisingly, his *Facetiae* indeed require highly open-minded readers who do not oppose sexual references and even some obscene episodes as long as they serve the ultimate purpose of creating intelligent entertainment and humor predicated on people's stupidity, moral and ethical shortcomings, silly behavior, and witty responses.<sup>194</sup>

Poggio Bracciolini demonstrated no hesitation in dealing with every aspect of human life, including all body functions, in order to address social issues, conflicts among people, ignorance, simple-mindedness, and the like, and to satirize them as foibles an intellectual should avoid.<sup>195</sup> The laughter which his narratives create is supposed to provide the necessary catalyst to overcome such problems and distance the cultured person from the ignoramuses and cretins. One typical example would be the fifth tale "Of the fool who thought that his wife had two vaginas" (26–27). The peasant husband displays such foolishness that one day when he happens to penetrate his wife's vagina just by accident he asks her whether she has two. She answers this positively because it makes it possible for her to let the local priest have one of the two, especially since the husband agrees to this arrangement. In fact, and here the narrative assumes grotesque features, the priest is invited to join the couple in their bed and to take control of the one vagina. Even when the husband gets an inkling of the priest transgressing the 'property lines,' and tries to warn him, he has to learn: "'God forbid! I don't envy your property in the slightest as long as I can use the church's portion'" (29). In "A Madwoman" (no. 24) we learn of a woman who has lost her mind and is taken to a soothsayer for a hoped-for cure. While she is carried across a body of water, sitting on the shoulder of a man, she suddenly imitates sexual intercourse and explicitly expresses her sexual desire ("vellem futuri"). The entire company laughs so hard that they fall down, and then strongly encourage the husband to fulfill his marital obligations. And indeed, as soon as this has happened, the woman's sanity is restored, which allows the narrator to give vent to his profound misogyny and

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<sup>194</sup> *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen von Gelächter im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten, 2005. See also Alison Williams, *Tricksters and Pranksters: Roguery in French and German Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 49 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), 1–21.

<sup>195</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Gertrud Blaschitz regarding the literary treatment of prostitutes and brothels.

deep distrust of women whom he identifies as sexually insatiable—an ancient concept already espoused by classic poets and the Church Fathers.<sup>196</sup>

However, Poggio was considerably more discriminating and could not be identified as guilty of presenting such crude one-sided satire, ridiculing women only. In “Of a preacher who preferred ten virgins to one married woman” (no. 43) the butt of the sexual joke is a friar who, in one of his sermons, thunders away vehemently attacking the sin of adultery. In order to drive his point home, he proclaims “that he would prefer to lie with ten virgins than with one married woman” (57). The narrator dryly, almost sarcastically comments: “And many of those present shared his opinion” (57). Similarly, when a man inquires of a woman why it is that usually men are the active pursuers of women, and not the other way around (“A woman’s facetious reply,” no. 46), he gets an earful more than he had hoped for: “We are always ready and prepared for sex, whereas you aren’t. If we went around pursuing you when you were not ready, we would be in a state of perpetual frustration” (58).

Many a tale is predicated on the notion of women being utterly obstinate (nos. 58, 59), and on the concept that peasants are rather stubborn and ignorant creatures (nos. 60 and 70). The very opposite, however, can also be found, and Poggio in fact freely picks and chooses anyone whom he has heard uttering either a witty or an utterly foolish remark. Sexuality often plays a major role, but it is not sex by itself. Instead, the author utilizes all kinds of common or unusual situations in human life to illustrate how witticism and intelligence can provide success, profit, victory, and triumph; hence he is remarkably transforming the sexual discourse into an epistemological enterprise.

A marvelous example proves to be “An argument between two whores over a piece of linen” (no. 77) in which two wives, one prettier than the other, visit a member of the Roman curia to earn money through prostituting themselves. The man takes the prettier woman twice, whereas the other one, out of pity and a sense of justice, only once. As a reward, he gives them a piece of linen, without dividing it for them according to their ‘work.’ On their way home they begin to fight over how to share the linen, the prettier one insisting on getting two parts, whereas the other woman demanding on splitting in equal terms. Soon enough, they begin to fight, and when their husbands observe this, they also enter the brawl without ever finding out the true cause of the struggle. The narrator only informs us that finally the linen “was placed in the custody of a neutral person while the women secretly negotiated a settlement” (78). Instead of deciding the case for us, we are at the end invited to judge for ourselves and to prove our wisdom: “Tell me, wise men, how would you judge?” (78).

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<sup>196</sup> *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires with Karen Pratt and C. W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 33–34, 50–52, 82, 96–97, et passim.

The primary purpose of this tale proves to be the problem how to make wise decisions, hence the satire of these two rather foolish women who secretly work as prostitutes. Moreover, the narrator ridicules their husbands who let themselves be drawn into a fight without knowing what the cause might have been in the first place. The account thus reveals all of their foolishness and ignorance, and invites us to laugh at them, but all this laughter is predicated on the carefree attitude of the narrator and, by default, his audience because of the critical premise that these two women sell their bodies to the councilman.

A final example might suffice to solidify our analysis of Poggio Bracciolini's unabashed, carefree treatment of sexuality as a most natural thing of the world and apparently as a natural aspect of his society. In "Of an old whore who became a beggar" (no. 92) an old woman can no longer attract lovers and so substitutes her previous profession of prostitution with begging. She appeals to the people on the street to have pity on her because she has "'abandoned sin and whoredom'" (88). A man reproaches her, however, for begging, and she protests: "'Nobody will have me now'" (88). But this statement reveals her true mind-set, as he immediately underscores: "'Then you've given up your life of sin out of necessity, not voluntarily'" (88).<sup>197</sup>

Several points deserve to be mentioned here. First, prostitution surfaces as a common profession for women who obviously meet a considerable need on the side of men in their society.<sup>198</sup> Second, old prostitutes suddenly face a hard destiny and have no real support group to rely on. Third, old women experience contempt

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<sup>197</sup> For the literary treatment of the old woman, either as a go-between or as a beggar, in late-medieval and early modern literature, see Lois W. Banner, *In Full Flower: Aging Women, Power, and Sexuality: a History* (New York: Knopf, 1992). See also Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus*. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); see also Mieszkowski's, Karen Pratt's, and Connie Scarborough's contributions to *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen.

<sup>198</sup> Vern L. Bullough, *The History of Prostitution* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1964); James A. Brundage, "Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law," *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judith M. Bennett, Elizabeth A. Clark, et al. (orig. in *Signs* 1, 4 [1976]; Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 79–99; Leah Lydia Otis-Cour, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc*. Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane. Family, Sexuality, and Social Relations in Past Times (1988; New York: Blackwell, 1988); P. J. P. Goldberg, "Pigs and Prostitutes: Streetwalking in Comparative Perspectives," *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 172–93; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Common Women*, 1996; Angel-Luis Molina Molina, *Prostitución, violencia y otras conductas sexuales transgresoras en la Murcia de los siglos XIV al XVI*. Cuadernos de la Cátedra de Historia Medieval, 7 (Murcia: Real Academia Alfonso X el Sabio, 2005). See now Dagmar M. H. Hemmie, *Ungeordnete Unzucht: Prostitution im Hanseraum (12.–16. Jahrhundert): Lübeck – Bergen – Helsingør*. Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte. Neue Folge, LVII (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2007). See also the contribution to this volume by Gertrud Blaschitz.

and ridicule especially when they are not married and have previously earned their money through selling their bodies. Most important, however, within our context this narrative confirms, once again, how little this fifteenth-century humanist writer cared about the moral implications of prostitution, though his sarcasm still indicates his opposition against this profession. Altogether, we might say, Poggio Bracciolini underscored through many different examples how openly he could talk about the human body and illustrate its various, especially sexual, functions in order to realize an epistemological goal, that is, to reflect upon the human condition within society and to discuss, by way of witty and humorous, sometimes sarcastic and biting tales, basic problems caused by people because of their individual failures and shortcomings. Sexuality per se, however, did not seem to have been of greater significance and could be easily incorporated into his literary discourse in order to achieve the goal to create laughter among his audience. This laughter, ultimately was then supposed to have cathartic effects.

Moreover, as "Of a widow who wanted to marry an old man" (no. 208) indicates, without a solid and healthy sexual relationship, no one seems to be able to live within a harmonious partnership, irrespective of age and social status. An old widow decides to remarry, simply "for the sake of company and mutual comfort" (171). She asks a neighbor for help and emphasizes how much her motivation is truly virtuous and religious since the time has come for her to prepare the soul for the afterlife. However, when the neighbor announces the next day that she has in fact found an ideal partner for her, ideal because of his virtues and, as she underscores, his lack in virility, which would eliminate all temptations of sexuality, the widow adamantly refuses to accept this offer. Her response, which serves as the trigger to cause the audience to laugh, sheds important light on the supreme importance of sexuality even at her age: "I wouldn't have him under any condition! For without a peacemaker . . . what mediator could restore peace between us should a serious altercation or dispute ever arise?" (171-72). This 'peacemaker' ("Pacialis") is satirically identified as "the procreator of humanity" (171), although the widow knows only too well that she is long past the age of fertility.

However, sexuality would be crucial in establishing peace among the couple: "She believed in living peacefully with her husband" (171); hence she recognizes and acknowledges sex as one of the most central aspects determining the gender relationship.

This widow is not characterized as a lustful "vetula," such as in the winter-songs by the thirteenth-century Middle High German poet Neidhart,<sup>199</sup> or as another

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<sup>199</sup> Siegfried Beyschlag, *Die Lieder Neidharts: Der Textbestand der Pergament-Handschriften und die Melodien. Text und Übertragung, Einführung und Worterklärungen, Konkordanzen. Edition der Melodien von Horst Brunner* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), L 15-L 16 (70-78), L 69 -L 72 (404-14); now see also: *Neidhart Lieder. Texte und Melodien sämtlicher*



Celestina (*Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*), but as a reasonable old woman who understands that life is easier if shared with another person, best with a marriage partner. But marriage would be hell if sexuality would not come in as an important vehicle to overcome conflict and strife. Poggio Bracciolini does not lambast old people for their unbridled concupiscence, and he does not even identify them as being especially in need of sexuality, though this seems to be a given, as richly illustrated by a huge corpus of late-medieval and Renaissance visual representations.<sup>200</sup> He determines, however, the overall significance of sexuality for any adult person at any age to cope with various external conflicts, internal problems, and general struggles between couples. The audience is invited to laugh about, or rather, with the widow because she realistically assesses the gender relationship and knows that sex cannot and should not be excluded.

This point, though approached from a different angle, is addressed in another tale as well. In "A daughter's excuse to her father for sterility" (no. 219)<sup>201</sup> a young woman cannot conceive and is finally rejected by her husband, apparently through the dispensation from the Church. Her father seriously reprimands her for having failed to resort to some alternative strategies and to compensate for her husband's presumed sterility. She vehemently protests against his wrong assumption and openly blames herself because she is truly barren: "I tried all the manservants, even the stableboys, but I couldn't conceive, and it did me no good at all" (179). If this were not facetious enough, the narrator then adds that her father consoled his daughter and accepted that "she was utterly blameless for being childless" (179). Indeed, nature has made her infertile, and it was not her fault because she tried every man she could attract to her since she had not had any luck with her husband. Adultery, then, would not have been a problem for the father, as long as his daughter would have been able to become pregnant. This short narrative is entirely based on difficulties with sexuality and fertility, which here assume critical legal functions. In this regard, it is important for us to observe how unabashedly the father even would have encouraged his daughter to sleep around, and that he would not have objected to a bastard child, as long as his daughter would have been able to conceive and deliver a baby.

Finally, though there would be hardly any end to the rich spectrum of intriguing, witty, and cultural-historically meaningful narratives, in "Giovanni

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*Handschriften und Drucke*. 3 vols., ed. Ulrich Müller, Ingrid Bennewitz, and Franz Viktor Spechtler. Final ed. by Ruth Weichselbaumer (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>200</sup> Anouk Janssen, "The Good, the Bad, and the Elderly: The Representation of Old Age in Netherlandish Prints (ca. 1550–1650)" (437–84), and Martha Peacock, "Hoorndragers and Hennesstasters: The Old Impotent Cuckold as 'Other' in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art" (485–516), *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen.

<sup>201</sup> In reality, this is narrative no. 221, ed. Ciccuto, 350 because Haywood skipped two tales (nos. 30 and 218).

Andrea, caught in the act of adultery" (no. 220),<sup>202</sup> laughter is provoked through the intelligent remark of a medical doctor who is caught by his wife *in flagrante* with a servant girl. The wife bitterly complains to him: "'Where is all that wisdom of yours now, Giovanni?'" (179), and she receives the most remarkable, but truly realistic and pragmatic answer: "'Here in this vagina where it fits very nicely'" (179). The husband knows that he has acted foolishly, making a mockery of his science and overall wisdom. But instead of submitting demurely and accepting his guilt, his response proves to be witty and demonstrates that he has not lost his good senses. In fact, our laughter almost provides him with approval of his transgression, making the wife the butt of the joke, although the fact remains that he cheated on her.

Poggio Bracciolini does not intend to examine critically moral and ethical issues. If pressed hard, he would certainly agree, as the situation outlined here clearly indicates, that the husband has to be blamed and excoriated for his wrong-doing, having hurt his wife badly through the sexual act with the servant girl. But this would not be the basic point of this narrative where the focus rests on the doctor's ability to come up with this intelligent remark. By admitting his own fault openly, but not expressing true feeling of guilt, he successfully takes the heat of the attack by his wife and invites the audience to laugh with him.

Considering that Poggio Bracciolini includes only a relatively small portion of narratives with an explicitly sexual content, and that he primarily reflects throughout only his interest in intelligent discourse, in smart communication, in outwitting people in specific situations, and in sophisticated rhetorical strategies, particularly in peculiar circumstances, we can reach, once again, an important conclusion. This humanist was not unusual for his time, or for the entire period, medieval or Renaissance, and recognized, or rather simply acknowledged that sexuality was part of human life, hence could not, or was not, to be suppressed in any fashion. He has his audience laugh about the various conditions within marriage and outside, and he never hesitates to incorporate highly graphic allusions to the specific body parts and to sexual acts. Sex happens, and it is, for the poet, a natural aspect of daily life, whether in marriage or in an adulterous affair, whether in a pre-marital relationship or with a prostitute. After all, as this source illustrates once again, sexuality is an irrepressible force and need and can be limited or forbidden only with highest disciplinary measures, ideological restraints, and rigid, conservative moral rules.

The intent of the *Facetiae*, however, is not to arouse his audience with the numerous erotic and specifically sexual allusions and discussions. When the theme centers on sexual matters, these serve to illustrate a point outside of sexuality, mostly pertaining to people's ignorance, stupidity, or intelligence and witticism.

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<sup>202</sup> Ed. Ciccuto, no. 222, 350–52.

For instance, in “Of a young woman fooled by an old husband” (no. 229), the young bride has been ill advised by an old woman to resist her bridegroom in the first night. He is surprised and disappointed, but, as the narrator comments in thinly veiled language: “his twig lay down, he turned over, and they slept until daybreak” (186). In the morning, suddenly filled with sexual lust, she awakens her husband and begs him to sleep with her. Now, however, he cannot get it up and responds: ““But now I have an ache in the tail”” (186). The intended laughter makes the young woman the butt of the joke, but the overall advice goes far beyond sexuality per se and addresses fundamental human behavior: “It is wise, therefore, to accept a good thing when it is offered” (186).

## 11. Sexuality Throughout Times: A Cultural-Historical Phenomenon. The History of Scholarship

We have observed the same strategy and approach at play both in the literary examples from the Middle Ages and in Renaissance. Whether we consider the *Carmina Burana* or the songs by Oswald von Wolkenstein, whether we examine Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* or Juan Ruiz’s *Libro de buen amor*, whether we take into consideration Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron* or the almost exactly contemporary and extraordinarily popular, though until today very little known *Le piacevoli notti* by Giovanni Francesco Straparola (ca. 1480–ca. 1557),<sup>203</sup> sexuality always makes its presence known, sometimes, if not often, assuming center position. This does not mean, of course, that the thematization of sexuality in the various historical periods continually represented the same phenomenon. Value systems change, and so ethical, moral, religious, and other ideological concepts and frameworks do too. Social and religious conditions determining how sexuality is viewed, evaluated, treated, and discussed also change throughout time, and this quite radically. But the unquenchable interest in and fascination with sexuality have never disappeared and might well be a fundamental and common aspect of

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*The Facetious Nights of Straparola*, trans. W. G. Waters. 4 Vols. (London: Society of Bibliophiles, 1898). Ruth B. Bottigheimer, “Straparola’s *Piacevoli Notti*: Rags-to-Riches Fairy Tales as Urban Creations,” *Merveilles et Contes* 8, 2 (1994): 281–96. For a brief literary-historical overview, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni\\_Francesco\\_Straparola](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Francesco_Straparola) (last accessed on April 14, 2007); see also Albrecht Classen, “The Tristan-and Isolde-Motif in Sixteenth-Century Italian Literature: Straparola’s Reception of a Medieval Narrative: A New Source of the *Tristan* Reception History,” *Tristania* 24 (2006): 79–94; for a broader narrative approach, see William Painter, *The Palace of Pleasure: Elizabethan Versions of Italian and French Novels from Boccaccio, Bandello, Cinthio, Straparola, Queen Margaret of Navarre, and Others*. 4th ed. Joseph Jacobs (1890; New York: Dover, 1966). Cf. also Gloria Allaire, *The Italian Novella*. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

all human life.<sup>204</sup> As our discussion of a wide range of European texts from the twelfth through the sixteenth century has revealed, a careful reading of specifically erotic texts continually brings to light how much poets wanted to come to terms with this basic experience and provided strong literary material for the erotic imagination.<sup>205</sup> One thing then is for certain: modern common notions about the Middle Ages as a world in which sexuality was harshly repressed and never found an outlet in literary discourse or elsewhere in public because of the dominance of the Catholic Church in people's lives need to be rejected and deconstructed before we can claim to get a better grip on that past world without relying on mythical concepts.<sup>206</sup>

The range of possible approaches to the broad theme of 'sexuality' with a particular focus on the Middle Ages and the early modern age proves to be considerable. The contributors to *Western Sexuality*, edited by Philippe Ariès and André Béjin (1982), examine, for example, the struggle for chastity among the early Church Fathers (Michel Foucault); homosexuality in ancient Rome (Paul Veyne); Saint Paul's struggle to come to terms with sexuality (Philippe Ariès); late-medieval prostitution (Jacques Rossiaud); sixteenth-century eroticism (Achillo Olivieri), etc.<sup>207</sup> The contributors to *Sex in the Middle Ages*, edited by Joyce E. Salisbury (1991), consider erotic magic (Richard Kieckhefer); medical approaches to sexuality, or rather, chastity (Esther Lastique and Helen Rodnite Lemay); sexual allusions in medieval Italian literature (Christopher Kleinhenz); late-medieval medical discussions of sexuality, with a focus on Johann Hartlieb's *Secreta*

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<sup>204</sup> Wolfgang Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität: Eine literaturpsychologische Studie über epische Dichtungen des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1990), 25–32, warns against the simplistic approach to perceive in human sexuality an unchangeable phenomenon and urges us to differentiate carefully in the critical study of sexuality, always taking into account the external conditions, whether we think of the role of the Church, the family structure, or the ethical ideals. It remains a challenge for modern historians to investigate how much the principles of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories can be applied to human behavior in the past.

<sup>205</sup> See, for example, A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as a Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Wolfgang Beutin, *Aphrodites Wiederkehr: Beiträge zur Geschichte der erotischen Literatur von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Peter Lang, 2005). See also the enormous collection of relevant texts, *Bibliotheca Germanorum erotica: Verzeichnis der gesamten deutschen erotischen Literatur mit Einschluss der Uebersetzungen . . .*, ed. by Hugo Hayn. 2nd ed. (Leipzig: A. Unflad, 1885). The list of relevant publications could be extended *ad nauseam*. But because of its excellent interdisciplinary approach to our topic, and with its focus on medieval documents and objects, see especially *L'Éroticisme au moyen âge*, ed. Bruno Roy (Paris: Les Éditions de l'Aurore, 1977). See also Jeremy Goldberg, "John Skathelok's *Dick*: Voyeurism and 'Pornography' in Late Medieval England," *Medieval Obscenities*, 105–23; here 108–16.

<sup>206</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 18–19.

<sup>207</sup> *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, 1982/1985.

*mulierum* (Margaret Schleissner); sex and confession in the thirteenth century (Pierre J. Payer); the open discussion of all kinds of sexual practices in the world of late-medieval Iceland (Cathy Jorgensen Itnyre); homosexuality discussed in Hebrew and Arabic poetry (Norman Roth); bestiality in the Middle Ages (Joyce E. Salisbury); the struggle with sexuality on the part of early medieval saints (Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg); and sodomy (James A. Brundage), not to mention a most curious study on specific cases of vaginal spasms discussed in medieval texts which led to the man's penis getting stuck in the woman (vaginism) (J. D. Rolleston and C. Grant Loomis).

The extent to which sexuality was of considerable interest particularly to a medical audience can be seen, for example, in a fifteenth-century Middle English compilation of scholarly and scientific text, Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52. On fol. 46v–50r a scribe copied a translation of Constantinus Africanus (ca. 1015–ca. 1090)'s *Liber de coitu*, most likely based on a lost Arabic treatise by Ibn al-Jazzār. The Latin *De coitu* has survived in at least twenty-two manuscripts (one of which as a fragment), not counting references to five further manuscripts. The Middle English translation, which covers ca. a third of the original, has come down to us in eight copies, and excerpts can be found in numerous later manuscripts.<sup>208</sup>

In their *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (1996), Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage have brought together articles that deal with confession and sexuality (Pierre J. Payer); sex and canon law (Brundage); sexuality in Western medicine and natural philosophy (Joan Cadden);<sup>209</sup> sexuality within the framework of the gender relationship (Joyce E. Salisbury); chaste marriage (Margaret McGlynn and Richard J. Moll); male sexuality (Jacqueline Murray); homosexuality (Warren Johansson and William A. Percy);<sup>210</sup> lesbianism (Murray);<sup>211</sup> cross-dressing and gender role

<sup>208</sup> Lister M. Matheson, "Constantinus Africanus: De coitu (*Liber creatoris*)," *Sex, Aging, & Death in a Medieval Compendium: Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52, Its Texts, Language, and Scribe*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina. 2 Vols. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 292 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 1:287–326.

<sup>209</sup> See also Danielle Jacquart and Claude Alexander Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (1985; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>210</sup> See also Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

<sup>211</sup> For a hilarious, unfortunately serious example of postmodern theory run amok in the attempt to uncover lesbian and 'queer' love in the Middle Ages, see Anna Klosowska, *Queer Love in the Middle Ages*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2005); she reaches the astounding, entirely speculative conclusion, 144: "Medieval writers actively exploit the security that the prestige of the classical and Occitan tradition provides them to explore the themes of same-sex preference and homoeroticism." See my review, forthcoming in *Mediaevistik*. It has also been quite fashionable to identify lesbian and gay love wherever poets express deep friendship or love for the Virgin Mary, which transforms the entire attempt, certainly worthwhile in itself, into a postmodern, perhaps I should say 'anachronistic,' project with little basis; see, for instance, *Gay and Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology from Sappho to Michelangelo*, ed. James J. Wilhelm. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1874 (New York

reversal (Vern L. Bullough);<sup>212</sup> prostitution (Ruth Mazo Karras); contraception and abortion (John M. Riddle); castration and eunuchism (Mathew S. Kuefler); plus an array of articles concerning the treatment of sexuality in the various European literatures.<sup>213</sup>

Not surprisingly, many rather popular authors have picked up on this fascinating topic and have provided us with sweeping overviews, such as Reay Tannahill (1980),<sup>214</sup> Sander L. Gilman (1989),<sup>215</sup> and Gabrielle Bartz, Alfred Karnein, and Claudio Lange (1994).<sup>216</sup> Others examine the intimate and powerful correlation between sex, sickness, and sin, which would not be an entirely foreign concept even in our times when many conservative thinkers correlated AIDS with profound sin against all Christian teachings.<sup>217</sup> The contributors to a volume entitled *Eros – Macht – Askese* explore the tense gender relationship in the Middle Ages and the early modern age as a discourse which was richly reflected in literature and the arts, studying, for instance, sexual images in medieval *misericords* (Gisbert Porstmann); marital conflicts as depicted in hagiographical texts (Claudia Opitz); the 'classical' role of the gullible and hypocritical Aristotle as Alexander the Great's teacher, being utterly fooled by his disciple's girlfriend, Phyllis (Bea Lundt); sexuality, eroticism, and obscenity in sixteenth-century verse narratives

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and London: Garland, 1995), 135–91. It also often proves to be highly problematic when terms such as 'desire,' 'gaze,' and 'the erotic' are used in a metaphorical sense to uncover hitherto unknown levels of meaning in texts or art work. In the introduction to their collection of articles, *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Craig A. Berry and Heather Richardson Hayton. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 294 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), vii, comment, for instance: "the writers discussed here were all political subjects for whom the articulation of desire was a way to stake out the boundaries of the individual self in relation to the communal subject." At closer review, the topics covered here have nothing to do with the erotic in the narrow sense of the word; instead they address desire to learn, to read, to understand a text, etc. The only significant exception here seems to be Suzanne Wayne's far-reaching analysis of "Desire in Language and form: Heloise's Challenge to Abelard" (89–107). See, however, the much more productive anthology, *Ordnung und Lust: Bilder von Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Bachorski. *Literatur – Imagination – Realität*, 1 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1991).

<sup>212</sup> See also Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe*. The New Middle Ages (New York and London: Garland, 1996); Suzanne Kocher, "Accusations of Gay and Straight Sexual Transgression in the Roman de la Violette," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, 189–210.

<sup>213</sup> For cases of voluntary female self-castration, see Peter Dinzelbacher, "Sexualität im Mittelalter," 50–51.

<sup>214</sup> Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980).

<sup>215</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History: Representing the Sexual in Medicine and Culture from the Middle Ages to the Age of AIDS* (New York: Wiley, 1989).

<sup>216</sup> Gabrielle Bartz, Alfred Karnein, and Claudio Lange, *Liebesfreuden im Mittelalter: Kulturgeschichte der Erotik und Sexualität in Bildern und Dokumenten* (Stuttgart: Belser, 1994).

<sup>217</sup> Peter L. Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

(Hans-Jürgen Bachorski); and the role of *eros* in early-modern illustrations of the 'Judgment of Paris' (Annegret Friedrich).<sup>218</sup> Most recently, Michael Jones published photos of a wide array of sexual badges, phallic objects, highly erotic decorative elements, and paintings with graphic sexual, if not even pornographic (but often, perhaps, rather apotropaic), elements. He believes "that many representations of the human sex organs (sometimes, of the literally dismembered male organs alone) continue to play their immemorial, apotropaic role. Whether pre-Christian in origin or not, there is a surprising wealth of such imagery affixed to the exterior of Romanesque churches . . . ." <sup>219</sup> And regarding female pubic hair, he underscores: "There was clearly a certain male fascination with female pubic depilation in the late Middle Ages . . . ." <sup>220</sup> Jones does not, however, venture far into a critical examination of this enormous wealth of popular culture, and it remains for us to figure out the ultimate epistemological nature of these remnants of, as Jones calls it, the "Secret Middle Ages."

Most recently, Ruth Mazo Karras has discussed the wide range of differences in the treatment of sexuality in modern times versus the Middle Ages, underscoring, for instance, the tremendous influence which the Catholic Church exerted on practically everyone in all social classes, the inability to avoid conception after a sexual union because of lack of any efficient birth control, and the vehement, deadly persecution of homosexuals, not to speak even of lesbians.<sup>221</sup> For a convenient collection of the relevant texts that address love, sex, and marriage, we can now consult the anthology edited by Conor McCarthy.<sup>222</sup>

## 12. Sexuality and the Process of Civilization – Revisiting an Old Debate: Sociology vs. Anthropology

Until today, however, the highly influential, undoubtedly seminal studies by Norbert Elias have shaped much of the common understanding of sexuality in the past. According to his investigations, the history of shame had a tremendous

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<sup>218</sup> *Eros – Macht – Askese*, ed. Helga Sciurie and Hans-Jürgen Bachorski, 1996. For the topic of 'Aristotle and Phyllis,' see also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgement\\_of\\_Paris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judgement_of_Paris); see also Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, 242–43.

<sup>219</sup> Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, 249–50.

<sup>220</sup> Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, 250.

<sup>221</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*; her argument, however, that the "biggest difference between medieval attitudes and those of today . . . is in the idea of sex as a transitive act, something done by someone to someone else" (23), would require, as far as I can see it, particularly in light of a vast number of literary texts, considerable differentiation and modifications. I would, on the other hand, fully agree with Karras that "there was indeed a field of discourse that could be called 'sexuality' in the Middle Ages" (155).

<sup>222</sup> *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, ed. Conor McCarthy, 2004.

impact on the attitude toward the body and all its basic functions. He predicates his entire research project on the assumption that the history of Western Europe has to be seen through the lens of a civilization process, gradually aiming for a higher level of cultural sophistication than in earlier times. Elias published his *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (On the Process of Civilization) as early as 1939, here disregarding an earlier publication in 1937 of a portion of his study, but it was really discovered and then quickly embraced by scholarship all over the world not until 1969. His profound, certainly seminal, monograph has been translated into numerous languages, and German reprints have been produced many times, both in hardcover and paperback,<sup>223</sup> although his work does not seem to have found adequate reception in Anglophone research.<sup>224</sup> The fundamental difference between “civilization” and *Kultur* (culture) emerges in the areas which each denotes, the first dealing with political, economic, religious, technical, moral, and social factors, the second concerning itself with intellectual, artistic, and religious facts (4). His focus rests on “civilization,” because here some of the most noticeable changes occurred over time.<sup>225</sup>

Western Civilization, as defined by Elias, experienced a dramatic shift after the late Middle Ages, which means for him around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and this process continued at least until the nineteenth. Since then, as he argues, the shame level increased dramatically and it became embarrassing to be seen by others without clothes on. Prior to this period, “People had a less inhibited—one might say a more childish—attitude toward the body, and to many of its functions” (135).<sup>226</sup> Whereas before, that is, in the medieval world, people knew hardly anything of shame, after the beginning of the early modern world this changed radically: “The unconcern in showing oneself naked disappears, as does that in performing bodily functions before others. And as this sight becomes less common place in social life, the depiction of the naked body in art takes on a new significance. More than hitherto it becomes a dream image, an emblem of

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<sup>223</sup> Here I rely on the trans. by Edmund Jephcott, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization* (1978; Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>224</sup> For some global comments, mostly limited to Elias as a sociologist at large, see Stephen Mannell, *Norbert Elias: Civilization, and the Human Self-Image* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1989); Dennis Smith, *Norbert Elias: A Critical Assessment* (London: Sage, 2000); see also Roger Salerno, *Beyond Enlightenment: Lives and Thoughts of Social Theorists* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Mary Fulbrook, *Un-Civilizing Processes?: Excess and Transgression in German Society and Culture: Perspectives Debating with Norbert Elias*. *German Monitor*, 66 (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007).

<sup>225</sup> See also my contribution to this volume (“Naked Men”).

<sup>226</sup> The identification of the Middle Ages with a childlike stage in human history also characterized Johan Huizinga’s *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. For a more detailed comparison between Huizinga’s arguments and Elias’s thesis, see Rüdiger Schnell, “Mittelalterliche Tischzuchten als Zeugnisse für Elias’ Zivilisationstheorie?” *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*, ed. id. (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004), 85–152; here 129, note 138.



wish-fulfillment" (135). Elias explains this alleged paradigm shift as a "development of a form that fits both our advanced standard of delicacy and the specific situation in which present-day social life places the individual" (136). Of course, Elias might have the nineteenth century primarily in mind, especially when he discusses the social function of the nightdress and underwear which could arouse embarrassment. Elias freely draws from conduct books and similar guide books for young people published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and concludes from them that a profound change in the civilization process has occurred.

Conflicts between parents and children arise "with the advance of the shame-frontier and the growing distance between adults and children, and [are] therefore largely founded on the structure of civilized society itself" (138). Arguing, perhaps mostly on the basis of personal experiences from the early twentieth century, despite a loose, and actually rather irrelevant, reference to Erasmus of Rotterdam, the sociologist comments: "The feeling of shame surrounding human sexual relations has increased and changed considerably in the process of civilization" (138).

However, here morality and immorality are situated in a vague historical time frame, and Elias continually returns to standards and principles formulated only in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (142), which, surprisingly, seem to undergo a radical change back to a much freer and relaxed approach to the body in current culture (late twentieth and early twenty-first century).<sup>227</sup> Would this mean that our society is reverting to its medieval roots? Was nudity truly an absolute taboo in the early modern world? What do we have to make of the culture of nude beaches, nudist colonies, etc.?<sup>228</sup>

Holding beliefs similar to the mythical assumption of the traditional concept of childhood in the premodern age, perhaps best represented by Philippe Ariès's famous *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (1960),<sup>229</sup> Elias assumed that medieval and early-modern children were nothing but small adults: "Even though subservient and socially dependent, boys lived very early in the same social sphere as adults. And adults did not impose upon themselves either in action or in words

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<sup>227</sup> Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History, 1890–1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>228</sup> Catherine Richardson, *Clothing Culture, 1350–1650. The History of Retailing and Consumption* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>229</sup> For a thorough deconstruction of this myth, see Albrecht Classen, "Philippe Ariès and the Consequences: History of Childhood, Family Relations, and Personal Emotions: Where do we stand today?" *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, 1–65. For an example of the longevity of the myth created by Ariès, see the otherwise well-researched and insightful study by Max Siller, "Oswald von Wolkenstein: Versuch einer psychohistorischen Rekonstruktion," *Medievalistik* 19 (2006): 125–51; here 128–31. He offers intriguing insights of a psycho-historical perspective. See also the contribution to this volume by Rasma Lazda-Cazers.

the same restraint with regard to the sexual life as later. In keeping with the different state of restraint of feelings produced in the individual by the structure of interpersonal relations, the idea of strictly concealing these drives in secrecy and intimacy was largely alien to adults themselves" (144).

But when did this shame level really change, if it ever fully did? And do Elias's theses truly apply to any of the material we have examined above? The texts that I have investigated were all adult love poetry, adult verse narratives, and other adult reading material. It might be useful to ask when children turned into young adults, and how adults might have identified this change, but none of the literary documents we have looked at, whether from the twelfth or from the sixteenth century, offer any significant insight into this debate, which was of no real concern for any of the love poets either in the age of the Renaissance or of the Baroque. Moreover, we can even discover a remarkably extensive discourse on the cultural significance of nudity in the high Middle Ages, associating it with identity, shame, and social status, such as in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (ca. 1205) and in some verse narratives by The Stricker ("Der nackte Ritter").<sup>230</sup>

Certainly, the Protestant Reformation, then the Enlightenment, and far-reaching social-economic changes in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transformed society profoundly on many different levels and in many cultural and economic perspectives, but the fundamental erotic discourse was apparently not affected by it, though public pressures seem to have forced it somewhat underground. Elias, however, argues that we have to distinguish between "aristocratic court society" and "medieval society" (146), probably meaning the transformation of the medieval courtly world into a Baroque courtly society which experienced a "shift toward concealment" (146). But he discusses these changes on such a general, abstract, level that one could easily either agree or disagree with him, as when he claims: "Only very gradually, subsequently, does a stronger association of sexuality with shame and embarrassment, and a corresponding restraint of behavior, spread more or less evenly over the whole of society. And only when the distance between adults and children grows does 'sexual enlightenment' become an 'acute problem'" (147).

In his attempt to reach a historically verifiable analysis of social, mental, emotional, moral, and ethical norms the author increasingly reaches a stage in his discussion where almost anything goes and we are almost required to make a leap of faith because the basic evidence is simply assumed to be there, whereas any critical analysis would undermine even the strongest theories. A case in point would be his analysis of monogamous marriage and the tolerance of illegitimate

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<sup>230</sup> Christopher Young, "At the End of the Tale: Didacticism, Ideology and the Medieval German Märe," *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext: Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektive*, ed. Mark Chinca, Timo Reuvekamp-Felber, and Christopher Young. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie, 13 (Berlin: Schmidt, 2006), 24–47.

children: "In earlier phases [one of these highly problematic, ultimately little meaning phrases—A.C.], depending on the balance of social power between the sexes, extramarital relationships for men and sometimes also for women were taken more or less for granted by secular society" (150).

Up to the sixteenth century we hear often enough that in the families of the most honorable citizens the legitimate and illegitimate children of the husband are brought up together; nor is any secret made of the difference before the children themselves" (150). Most revealingly, Elias concludes: "The man was not yet forced socially to feel ashamed of his extramarital relationship" (150). Or: "There is plentiful evidence that in this courtly aristocracy [probably again meaning 'early modern, perhaps Baroque, society—A.C.] the restriction of sexual relationships to marriage was very often regarded as bourgeois and socially unsuitable" (151). Since Elias takes the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as his reference point, everything prior was, of course, very different, but he utterly ignores how much specific literary discourses continued throughout the centuries, and how much modern scholars would have to be highly sensitive to questions regarding the selection of evidence, the context in which this evidence is situated, and the discursive nature of much of the voices that he is dealing with. And as some scholars have rightly pointed out, the interest in sexuality as a "newsworthy" topic in literary discourse only began by the thirteenth and steadily grew over the next centuries, despite countless efforts by the authorities to impose new puritan legislation and to employ the police force to control public mores. In fact, the curve of 'sexuality' seems to have gone up in the early modern age, entirely contrary to Elias's conclusions.<sup>231</sup>

Using the popular folk songs composed in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries as a benchmark, it would be very difficult to agree with Elias that "all these functions [pertaining to sexuality and all other bodily functions—A.C.] are gradually charged with sociogenetic shame and embarrassment, so that the mere mention of them in society is increasingly restricted by a multitude of controls and prohibitions. More and more, people keep the functions themselves, and all reminders of them, concealed from one another" (155).

There is no doubt, of course, that Elias opened a new research field and laid the foundations for the investigation of how civilization develops and progresses, if that is indeed the case. He has often been praised as one of the most influential twentieth-century sociologists, particularly because of his *The Civilizing Process*, though the praise that was heaped on his work pertains more to the effectiveness and consistency of the new paradigm that he had developed than to the validity of his theses in detail.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Anne Glyn-Jones, *Holding up a Mirror: How Civilizations Decline* (London: Century, 1996), 236–39.

<sup>232</sup> See, for example, the articles consistently dedicated to the lasting impact by Elias's thoughts in

We have already observed how consistently the erotic discourse permeated the culture and literature both of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and to this we could easily add the world of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century.<sup>233</sup> Famous art historian Eduard Fuchs demonstrated that the theme of sexuality, in a myriad of manifestations, was dealt with consistently and intensively throughout the ages from antiquity to the present, though each period pursued different approaches, sometimes more openly, sometimes more secretly. The interest in sexual topics, frankly, if not graphically, discussed by sixteenth-century writers such as Marguerite de Navarre in her *Heptaméron* or Martin Montanus in his *Schwankbücher*, was considerable, not to mention the latter's contemporaries Hans Wilhelm Kirchhoff, Michael Lindener, and Jakob Frey.<sup>234</sup> The same applies to seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries literature, whether we think of the works by Nicolas Chorier (*Elegantiae latini sermonis Aloisiae Sigae Toletanae Satira de Arcanis Amoris et Veneris*, 1568 or 1659), Tirso de Molina (*El burlador de Sevilla*, 1630), or Johann Gottfried Schnabel (*Der im Irrgarten der Liebe herumtaumelnde Cavalier*, 1738).<sup>235</sup> Of course, it often entirely depends on the individual writer, since someone like Samuel Pepys left little room for doubt about his most private experiences in marriage, as reflected in his diaries covering the years 1660–1669. Gilles de Gouberville (1521–1578), on the other hand, was highly concerned about his privacy and did not discuss sexuality any more explicitly than disease.<sup>236</sup> Early

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Norbert Elias and *Human Interdependencies*, ed. Thomas Salumets (Montreal, Kingston, London, and Ithaca: McGill and Queen's University Press, 2001). In the one and only study that seemingly focuses on sexuality, Stephen Guy-Bray's "Civilizing Sexuality: Marie de France's Lay with Two Names" (149–58), we learn only about the poet's deliberate and highly self-conscious handling of creating her narrative, whereas the issue of sexuality quickly disappears behind the article's title. Jonathan Fletcher's *Violence and Civilization: An Introduction to the Work of Norbert Elias* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), highlights the correlation between violence, control of violence, and the emergence of the modern state, particularly in the nineteenth century, but has nothing to say about the actual process of civilization.

<sup>233</sup> Eder, *Kultur der Begierde*, discusses sexual lust in rural cultures in pre-industrial society, the criminalization of sexuality from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century, masturbation as a topic of public discourse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the early-modern scientific discourse of sexuality, homosexuality, sexual lust among the class of nineteenth-century proletarians, and so forth, thereby indicating how much the topic of sexuality as a matter of public interest can also be pursued far into our present time.

<sup>234</sup> Wolfgang Beutin, "Sexualität/Liebe: Neuzeit," *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelsbacher. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 469 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993), 89–103; Werner Röcke, "Schwanksammlung und Schwankroman," 180–95.

<sup>235</sup> Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt: A The Myth-Making Process*. The New Middle Ages (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 141–43.

<sup>236</sup> Madeleine Foisil, "The Literature of Intimacy," *A History of Private Life*, ed. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby. Vol. III: *Passions of the Renaissance*, ed. Roger Chartier, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (1986; Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 327–61; here 348–58.

modern art, such as primarily represented by Titian and his followers, was deeply influenced by the enjoyment of the erotic and the implicit sexual. The erotic gaze on the human body and the fantasizing about the other gender in erotic terms seems to have gained even more weight in the sixteenth century, though it would be erroneous to discredit medieval art in this regard.<sup>237</sup>

Sometimes erotic art was decried as pornographic, sometimes it was publicly embraced as esoteric and aesthetically pleasing. To deny, however, that sexuality has played a most decisive role in all cultures throughout time, even during the most puritan and repressive periods, and simply could not be suppressed or marginalized, such as by the Church, and other authorities, flies in the face of a flood of relevant art works and literary texts from the Middle Ages until today.<sup>238</sup> Especially caricatures from all periods provide important evidence against the theses developed by Elias, though we would have to agree that the level of opposition against the open display of the body and its functions changed throughout time, especially as a reflection of a growing interest in policing individual behavior, social and moral norms, and hence in establishing strong control mechanisms against unruly sections of the population; and with regard to threatening sexuality primarily women were scapegoated and identified as witches.<sup>239</sup> Whether this was a progressive, linear process, or a much more complex cultural-historical development, with many deviations and leaps and bounds, remains to be seen and can also not be answered by the contributors to

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<sup>237</sup> Nicola Suthor, *Augenlust bei Tizian: Zur Konzeption sensueller Malerei in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Fink, 2004), 51–74; here 62–74. See also Gilles Néret, *Erotica Universalis*, English trans. Chris Miller, German trans. Helga Weigelt (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1994). With his collection of reproductions of art from antiquity to the present he offers convincing evidence that the interest in the sexual permeates all cultures and all periods; the problem comes in when certain moral standards enforced by the authorities/the Church change and necessitate the disappearance of the relevant art work into the vaults and cellars of museums worldwide.

<sup>238</sup> Eduard Fuchs, *Geschichte der erotischen Kunst: Das zeitgeschichtliche Problem* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1922); see also his *Illustrierte Sittengeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. 3 vols. (Munich: Albert Langen, 1909–1912). Both works have been translated into numerous languages and have obviously experienced a considerable rediscovery globally in the last decades of the twentieth century. See also the richly illustrated catalogue to the exhibit, *100.000 Jahre Sex: Über Liebe, Fruchtbarkeit und Wollust*, ed. Vincent T. van Vilsteren and Rainer-Maria Weiss (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2003/2004). Even the wide field of aphrodisiacs, developed and employed throughout times, confirm the counter-thesis, see Magnus Hirschfeld and Richard Linsert, *Liebesmittel: Eine Darstellung der geschlechtlichen Reizmittel (Aphrodisiaca)* (Berlin: Man Verlag, 1930).

<sup>239</sup> Eduard Fuchs, *Die Frau in der Karikatur* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1906). For the history of women's subjugation as political individuals and as representatives of allegedly loose sexual mores, see Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 243–46. She concludes, 246: "By the eighteenth century, sex itself, as much as witchcraft, seems to be what propelled the progress of the case and began to provide an underlying explanation for behaviour, even while the idiom of the case remained that of witchcraft." For a much more comprehensive analysis of this complex topic, see the contribution to this volume by Allison Coudert.

this volume in any simplifying manner. If we consider, for instance, the overarching influence of modern myths about sexual practices in the past, as perhaps best encapsulated by the often quite bizarre and absurd notion of the medieval chastity belt,<sup>240</sup> we easily realize how problematic such black-and-white perceptions regarding shame, embarrassment, the erotic, and sexuality prove to be.

Whether we can agree with Rüdiger Schnell and his colleagues that the civilization process identified and outlined by Elias never took place, at least not to the extent and within that time frame,<sup>241</sup> remains to be seen. But they are certainly correct in rejecting the notion that this alleged 'process of civilization' should not necessarily be associated with 'progress,' especially because the experience of sexuality is so fundamental and unavoidable for the survival of humanity. Moreover, they are also right in their assessment that efforts to educate the young generation and to raise them according to specific moral and ethical norms did not set in so late as the sixteenth or seventeenth century. By contrast, already in the early Middle Ages numerous didactic and pedagogical writers emphasized how much they were concerned with the well-being of children, the need to educate them properly, and to help them to grow into mature, fully functioning adults.<sup>242</sup>

One of the major problems with Elias's hypothesis consists in his mono-disciplinary approach, basically informed by the principle of sociology. In 1988 the German anthropologist Hans Peter Duerr was one of the first to argue vehemently against the theses of a process of civilization as outlined by Elias, and he insisted that shame and a private relationship to one's own body belong to the constants in human society, which would not allow us to identify changing attitudes to those aspects as reflecting a fundamental paradigm shift in civilization from 'primitive' to 'sophisticated' and 'cultured'.<sup>243</sup> But Duerr does not limit himself to Western

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<sup>240</sup> Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt*.

<sup>241</sup> *Zivilisationsprozesse*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell, 7.

<sup>242</sup> See, for example, the contribution by Nikolaus Henkel, "Tischzucht und Kinderlehre um 1500: Eine unbekannte deutsche Übersetzung von 'De facetia mensae' des Giovanni Sulpizio Verolano (Johannes Sulpitius Verulanus)," *Zivilisationsprozesse*, 153–68.

<sup>243</sup> Hans Peter Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988); see also the second volume, *Intimität*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990); subsequently Duerr dealt with related topics: *Obszönität und Gewalt*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 3 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1993); *Der erotische Leib*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 4 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1997); *Die Tatsachen des Lebens*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 5 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002). Some of these volumes have already been translated into various languages (vol. 1, Italian 1991; Swedish 1994; French 1998; Japanese 1990; Turkish 1990; Portuguese 2002; vol. 3, Swedish, 1998; but so far not into English). For the very opposite anthropological approach to the question of civilization, intellectual development, rationality, and culture, identifying the Middle Ages with a time of 'primitivism,' see Don LePan, *The Cognitive Revolution in Western Culture*. Vol. 1: *The Birth of*

Europe, and not the Middle Ages either; instead he examines shame cultures all over the world and in many different periods, such as nudity and baths in ancient Greece, Rome, in Japan, Russia, and Scandinavia, and elsewhere.<sup>244</sup> Without going into details, which would require a whole book-length examination,<sup>245</sup> we can summarize Duerr's position as follows: he operates with a thesis according to which shame and embarrassment about the nude body are not specific elements of individual stages in an alleged process of civilization and that shame about exposing oneself in public cannot be determined as the result of a profound change in human culture. As some of his examples illustrate, medieval knights often, if not regularly, displayed great hesitation in exposing their bodies to the views of women, and vice versa. And the exposure by drunken men, by belligerent criminals, or by youth groups in late-medieval cities regularly and swiftly led to their imprisonment and persecution by the authorities. However, Duerr's point concerns shame and whether the clothed or naked body reflects individual stages in any cultural development. He does not truly address the issue of whether sexuality was of any concern in the Middle Ages or other periods, which it was without any doubt.<sup>246</sup>

On a more global level, Duerr suggests that individuals in the past tended to belong to much more tight-knit social communities than today, hence were much more subject to social control, which explains, according to his view, the invariability of automatic responses to feeling of shame both then and in our world: "es gehört zum *Wesen* des Menschen, sich seiner Nacktheit zu schämen, wie immer diese Nacktheit auch historisch definiert sein mag; vom Baume des Lebens sind die Mitglieder aller Gesellschaften entfernt" (vol. 1, 12; it is part of man's nature to be ashamed of nakedness, however this nakedness might be defined in historical terms; the members of all societies have left the tree of life). In fact, Duerr might be correct in his anthropological perception that people have always been prone to feel embarrassed when their naked bodies were exposed in public. But by the same token he ignores the varying degrees of how the

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*Expectation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: The Macmillan Press, 1989).

<sup>244</sup> Particularly the world of ancient Greece and Rome has often attracted the attention of historians of sexuality, see Otto Kiefer, *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. from the German (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956; rpt. New York: Dorset Press, 1993; London: Constable, 1995; [Whitefish, MO]: Kessinger, 2006). Orig. published as: *Kulturgeschichte Roms unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der römischen Sitten* (Berlin: Aretz, 1933). The difference in meaning between the German and the English titles could provide much insight into differences between modern Anglophone and German attitudes toward the sexual. A literal translation would have been: *Cultural History of Rome with Special Consideration of Roman Customs*.

<sup>245</sup> See Michael Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess: Mythos oder Realität: Wissenschaftssoziologische Untersuchungen zur Elias-Duerr-Kontroverse*. *Figurationen*, 4 (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2002), 80–90.

<sup>246</sup> Michael Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess*, 153–65.

authorities reacted to nudity and how specific societies responded to “deviant” behavior, especially if it seemed to reveal genitals or led to certain types of sexual activities. Moreover, legal and theological responses to nakedness, sexuality, and the like are prescriptive and attempt to impose order, discipline, and to establish control, whereas the issue that we pursue here deals with the discourse of sexuality and its mental-historical evaluation.

Neither Elias nor Duerr was particularly qualified through their academic training to make well-founded statements about medieval and early-modern cultures, especially with regard to the public attitudes toward the body and its various functions. And they did actually not disagree totally, as Duerr admitted himself in the second volume, where he concedes that various cultures or societies impose different levels of control mechanisms to contain the fundamental force of sexuality.<sup>247</sup> Michael Hinz, for one, identified where the actual disagreement actually lies, confirming, for instance, that Duerr and Elias address not entirely synonymous aspects and approach their topics from different scientific premises and with different research questions. Whereas Duerr pursues a too black-and-white perspective, Elias is too focused on structural elements without looking at individual testimonies, evidence, and illustrative material.

Ultimately, as Hinz concludes, we face the necessity “von Zivilisierungsprozessen stets im Plural zu sprechen, sich von Annahmen einer eindimensionalen Entwicklung von Zivilisierungsprozessen im Sinne eines Mehr oder Weniger von Affektkontrollen, eurozentrischen Übertragungen des französisch-abendländischen Zivilisierungsmodells auf außereuropäische Überlebensgemeinschaften zu verabschieden und widersprechende empirische Daten stärker zur Kenntnis zu nehmen” (396; to speak of the process of civilization always in plural, to distance ourselves from the assumption of a one-dimensional development in these processes of civilization in the sense of more or less control of emotions, and from transferring of the French-European model of civilization onto non-European societies. We must take into account more of the contradictory empirical data). Indeed, this is the purpose of the present volume, with its cacophony of different, sometimes even contradictory, voices examining the nature and discourse of sexuality in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

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<sup>247</sup> Hans Peter Duerr, *Intimität*, 19–20. He also raises the critical question: “Eine ganz andere Sache ist indessen die Frage, warum sich in bestimmten Gesellschaften unterschiedlich hohe Scham- und Peinlichkeitsschranken finden lassen und warum sich etwa in unserer eigenen Gesellschaft zu bestimmten Zeiten diese—oder, genauer gesagt, gewisse—Schranken gesenkt haben oder angehoben worden sind” (20; The question why we can find in specific societies differently elevated levels of shame and embarrassment and why, for example, in our own society at individual moments these, or should we say, certain, levels were lowered or were raised, is an entirely different matter).



### 13. Concluding Remarks

To conclude, then, our focus does not rest on global issues with their significant historical-sociological and anthropological dimensions, as if we still could outline in broad brush strokes the actual history of mentality as it manifested itself evenly and systematically on every social, economic, and political level throughout those more than seventeen-hundred years. On the contrary, we are concerned with sexuality as a common phenomenon in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as it was discussed, examined, fought over, practiced, rejected, represented, illustrated, hidden, or exposed in many different corners, center pieces, on the stage, in literary texts, historical documents, and so forth. Whether subsequent epochs espoused different approaches to sexuality remains difficult to determine, whereas we can be certain that sexuality was of greatest concern both for the public and for the authorities, especially the Catholic Church, considering the countless penitentials, canons, and related legal documents.<sup>248</sup>

Quite naturally, literature assumes a center position, as my introduction and many of the contributions demonstrate.<sup>249</sup> The reason for this preponderance is quite simple, as the literary discourse provides considerably more freedom to play with imaginations and hidden desires, to evoke emotions and to incite the audience.

However, at closer analysis we would easily come across numerous examples of visual representations that are either predicated on the theme of sexuality or target it directly. The theme of sex could assume an apotropaic function, it could pursue satirical purposes, or it could provide external stimulation for all kinds of audiences. But it was also used with pedagogical and didactical intentions in mind, depending on the context and circumstances, conditions of the time, the patron's wishes, and the freedom granted to the individual artist.<sup>250</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>248</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, 1987; Charles J. Reid, *Power Over the Body, Equality in the Family: Rights and Domestic Relations in Medieval Common Law*. Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004).

<sup>249</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 10: "Imaginative literature gives us the most vivid examples of actual medieval life—or so it seems." But she correctly warns us from a traditionally positivistic viewpoint: "These works were written to express ideas or to entertain a medieval audience, not to inform historians" (10).

<sup>250</sup> Jorgen Andersen, *The Witch on the Wall: Medieval Erotic Sculpture in the British Isles* (Copenhagen: Rosenkile and Bagger, and London: Allen and Unwin, 1977); Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust*, discuss primarily sexual carvings on medieval churches that were apparently intended for educational and religious goals. For secular, erotic wall paintings in the Middle Ages, see C. Jean Campbell, *The Game of Courting: The Art of the Commune of San Gimignano, 1290–1320* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). See also Michael Camille, "Manuscript Illumination and the Art of Copulation," *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz. Medieval Cultures, 11 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997),

as Ruth Mazo Karras concedes, in many cases the answers to the question what explicitly sexual motives might have to do in historical, political, and even religious contexts, such as the Bayeux Tapestry with its rich web of meanings and messages, might be almost completely elusive for us today.<sup>251</sup> At the same time we can be certain that modern concepts about past notions concerning sexuality tend to obfuscate the actual discourse about it, and impose their own notions on a variety of literary, religious, artistic, and historical documents. And it seems highly problematic to talk about pornography in any of those instances where the discussion centers increasingly on the plain physical actions, that is, on the coitus, and related sexual activities. But this is not a problem of historical semantics; instead it specifically reflects the difficulties all societies, cultures, and religions have had in regard to a constructive approach to the thematization of the body and its sexual functions.

Kerstin Mey offers the most helpful discussion of the intricate concept of pornography versus plain sexuality: "The exclusion of sexuality from aesthetics is anchored in the Cartesian split between body and mind that has been confounding for Western thought for centuries. It is undeniable that the Church had an intensely formative and long-lasting influence on this constellation in the Judeo-Christian societies in and beyond Western Europe. For the emerging and established bourgeois culture there, 'just-sublimation' and aestheticization gained primacy, at least officially, rather than an unqualified permission of sensual pleasures and carnal lust. But then, capitalist culture, as the German philosopher Marx so aptly analysed, is fundamentally defined by double standards."<sup>252</sup>

Curiously, the *Roman de la rose* experienced, as we have seen above, an enormous popularity, especially the second part where all poetic pretenses are removed and the basic narrative topic focuses on the sexual intercourse. Oswald von Wolkenstein, on the other hand, and so also Heinrich Wittenwiler with his *Ring* (one manuscript only), could hardly reach out to any large audience and seem to have composed their works primarily for their own purposes, or at least only for a small audience that could understand the implied strategies and moral,

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Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002). See also the contribution to this volume by Julia Wingo Shinnick.

<sup>251</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 15.

<sup>252</sup> Kerstin Mey, *Art and Obscenity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 6. She adds, 7: "The term obscenity is itself constituted through the performance of public/legal/cultural discourse around the objects and actions in tandem with gradually emerging and expanding, and increasingly sophisticated, mass-communication and information networks: print media, broadcasting, and the internet." But would not Guillaume le Neuf's poem fall under the category of the pornographic? How should we read the various short narratives by Poggio Bracciolini in his *Fazetiae*? In fact, we are missing appropriate terms and cannot really identify where the fault lines are located with regard to individual evaluations of sexuality. Hence the need to explore in greater detail the true meaning of sexuality as a matter of discourse, both in the premodern period and today.

allegorical, if not even anagogical, messages behind the drastic sexual allusions.<sup>253</sup> Nevertheless, the erotic discourse continued throughout the centuries, as perhaps best illustrated by the myth of the medieval chastity belt which gained its most advanced momentum only by the end of the late nineteenth century. Then it suddenly became fashionable to project all kinds of “deviant” sexual practices—we could almost call them erotic imaginations of a suppressed mind in the modern world—back into the past and to create a black-and-white scenario pertaining to fundamental sexuality, as if sexual repression represents a more advanced stage in civilization.<sup>254</sup> One of the reasons why this myth proved to be so effective might have been because the authorities intend to distinguish the present civilization with its high level of control mechanisms that partly subjugates the individual and forces it to repress its sexual desires, at least in public, but partly also bombards the individual with sexual messages (commercials, e.g.), from the medieval. Another reason might be to provide the basis for continuous cultural-historical myths concerning the progressive development of the Western world since the late Middle Ages—but in this context never fully or satisfactorily defined and explained.<sup>255</sup>

Ultimately, there is no denying that virtually all people talk about and imagine sex; and most art and literature reflect hidden desires, open reflections of sexual lust, and provide concrete images of the sexualized body. Late-medieval German poetry even contains a number of most explicit examples dealing exclusively with the vagina, praising and describing it from many different perspectives.<sup>256</sup> The

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<sup>253</sup> Eckart Conrad Lutz, *Spiritualis Fornicatio: Heinrich Wittenwiler, seine Welt und sein 'Ring'*. Konstanzer Geschichts- und Rechtsquellen, XXXII (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990), 227–40. For an art-historical example, see the famous late fifteenth-century *Medieval Housebook* today preserved at Wolfegg Castle, Allgäu, Germany, Christoph Graf zu Waldburg Wolfegg, *Venus and Mars: The World of the Medieval Housebook* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1998), 36–39, 60–71. Here, the depiction of the astronomical sign of Venus includes numerous sexual scenes that leave no doubt about the actions performed by the people involved. Nudity of a couple in a bath tub and coitus of a still clothed couple in the background highlight what Venus means for those born under her influence, as we read in the accompanying poem: “Beautiful bodies, parched by lust’s heat, / my children find love’s duties sweet,” 36.

<sup>254</sup> Myths about progress in the present and myths about an obscure past from which a present culture emerged often conflate and contribute to a highly constructed view of history itself, which is by and large determined by narratives, not by facts; see the intriguing theoretical reflections by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: ON Difficult Middles*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2006), 1–10. He also indicates how much the practice of, or banning of, sexuality could deeply contribute to the myth formation, hence to the establishment of identity, see 20, 87–90, 96–100, 104–05, 131, 154–55, and 157.

<sup>255</sup> Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt*.

<sup>256</sup> See Albrecht Classen and Peter Dinzelsbacher, “Futilitates Germanicae Medii Aevi redivivae: Erotisches und Obszönes in der Literatur des deutschen Spätmittelalters. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar,” to appear in *Mediaevistik*. Ernst English, “Die Beurteilung sexueller

references to anthropomorphized genitalia, both male and female, in so-called “Priapeia,” that is, late-medieval verse narratives, both in French (*fabliaux*) and German (*mæren*) were not so uncommon.<sup>257</sup> It would be foolish to demarcate, in this regard, the Middle Ages from the modern age, though we could easily agree with Elias that the process of civilization indeed had a profound impact and deeply influenced the way we talk about and imagine the other sex. We could draw from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German *Meisterlieder* as evidence that sexuality significantly occupied the mind of artists and poets,<sup>258</sup> or we could turn our attention to twelfth- and thirteenth-century courtly texts as evidence that the discourse of sexuality raged already at that early time.<sup>259</sup> But this would not provide us with any proof concerning the cultural conditions in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance/Reformation as a time when sexuality dominated public culture. As soon as we turn our attention to issues concerning the sexual relationship between the genders during the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, not to speak of the modern time, we come across just the same phenomena, perhaps sometimes less, but perhaps at other times also hidden more behind a moral mask.<sup>260</sup> The phenomenon of concubinage among early-modern nobility, for instance, was wide-spread and normally even publicly acknowledged as long as it did not negatively affect the family honor. As Judith J. Hurwich emphasizes in her well-researched study on the *Zimmern Chronicles*, “Keeping a concubine was one aspect of the noble style of life, demonstrating the aristocratic attributes of wealth, leisure, and dominance over the rest of society. . . . Such extramarital affairs by noble husbands were regarded as compatible with the goal of *concordia* or absence of discord in marriage, and even with the ideal of love between spouses. . . . However, social conventions prescribed that the husband’s attentions to his mistress must not damage the honor of the wife and legitimate family.”<sup>261</sup>

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Verhaltensweisen im Mittelalter,” 177–80. He identifies this type of uninhibited treatment of female sexual genitals as “Verbalexhibitionismus” (178).

<sup>257</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Albrecht Classen. For further discussions, see Wolfgang Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität*, and id., “Sexualsymbolik in einem Fundus spätmittelalterlicher Kleinplastiken und in der Dichtung,” *Mediaevistik* 18 (2005): 19–67; cf. also Peter Dinzelsbacher, “Mittelalterliche Sexualität: Die Quellen.”

<sup>258</sup> Ulrike-Marianne Schulz, *Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität im vorreformatorischen Meistersang: Texte und Untersuchungen*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 624 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1995).

<sup>259</sup> John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France Around 1200*. The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>260</sup> *The Old Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1991).

<sup>261</sup> Judith J. Hurwich, *Noble Strategies: Marriage and Sexuality in the Zimmern Chronicle*. Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, 75 (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2006), 193.

Again, however, this should not make us dismiss all cultural-historical distinctions between, say, the age of the Baroque and the Middle Ages, at least with regard to the history of sexuality. But we need to remain highly circumspect concerning the impact which the topic of sexuality had on every culture, whether we are looking at the early or the late Middle Ages, the age of the Protestant Reformation or the Baroque. Intriguingly, as we could almost claim, each historical period has been profoundly determined by sexuality, and there seems to be nothing more important than the topic of sex in order to understand any aspect of culture in previous centuries, and today, at least as long as we understand the extent to which sexuality has always constituted the basis of most cultural energies and activities.

What has changed, however, and this quite remarkably and drastically, has been society's response to sexuality, increasingly trying to repress its manifestations and realizations in public and in private.<sup>262</sup> No wonder that the Catholic Church, throughout its entire two-thousand year existence, has consistently and acrimoniously fought against sex as one of the venial sins, trying in vain to keep it limited as a necessary evil within the bounds of marriage only. After all, the battle has always concerned the very foundation of all cultural activities, and it remains to be seen even today whether sexuality or religion—ultimately the difference between both areas might not even be as great as commonly assumed—will dominate the public discourse, or whether both areas will prove to be intriguingly complementary at long last.<sup>263</sup> We also would have to pay close attention to the rise of urban mentalities with their considerably more restrictive moral and ethical morals in the early modern age which tended to conflict with those still embraced by the nobility. Froben Christoph von Zimmern (1519–1566), for instance, expressed “surprise that the town council of Strasbourg ‘many years ago expelled all concubines [*beisitz*] and passed a law that such lewd behavior was not permitted. This was strictly enforced and no one was spared, not even if he was a nobleman or one of the most powerful burghers; this applied not only to married men but also to those who remained single, whether clerical or lay” (ZC 4:174–75).<sup>264</sup> Nevertheless, even those new city law codes that struggled to come

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<sup>262</sup> I would like to express my thanks to Allison Coudert for her critical comments on this introduction that forced me to rethink some of the basic changes in the early modern period and whether, or rather how, they came about.

<sup>263</sup> See, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages*. *Studies in Spirituality*, 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), especially 234–40; Martha A. Brozyna, *Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages: a Medieval Source Documents Reader* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005); Susannah Mary Chewning, *Intersections of Sexuality and the Divine in Medieval Culture: the Word Made Flesh* (Aldershot, Hampshire, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>264</sup> Hurwich, *Noble Strategies*, 194–95.

to terms with issues such as brothels, prostitution, and concubinage, signal the irrepressible force of sexuality per se both in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Issuing such laws, however, indicated both that concubinage and prostitution continued to thrive throughout the early modern age, and also that urban and other authorities employed multi-pronged approaches to impose new restrictions and more conservative value systems.

In fact, looking back to the high Middle Ages again, would not mystical experiences, such as those reflected by Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179) or Marguerite Porète (d. 1310), be some of the most dramatic, if not the ultimate, visions of the sexual union of the Christian soul with the Godhead?<sup>265</sup> We could speculate a lot about this most provocative thesis, and I am happy to leave the reader with this strange formulation.<sup>266</sup> Gertrud the Great (1256–1301/1302) reports, for instance, of a vision in which her words transformed into sharp spears which penetrated the heart of Jesus, triggering ineffable sweet lust in her: “medullitus penetrando inaestimabiliter suavissima delectatione commovere.”<sup>267</sup> Similar, if not even more intensive, or graphic, images can be found in the revelatory account by Margareta Ebnerin (ca. 1291–1351) which unmistakably reflects an orgasmic experience basically identical with a sexual sensation. She regularly kissed every crucifix she could find; she tried to carry them, or to press them onto her body. Once she even got hold of a sculptured figure of the child Jesus and placed it on her naked breast, leading to a maternal vision: “aber min begirde und min lust ist in dem säugen, daz ich uz siner lutern menschet gerainiget werde und mit siner inbrünstiger minne uz im ernzündet werde . . .” (but my lust and desire is directed toward nursing [Him] so that I would be purified by his pure human nature and that I will be inflamed by his ardent love).<sup>268</sup>

In fact, as Peter Dinzelbacher confirms, many other mystics struggled hard to cope with the passionate feelings of love, sexual desires, and lust, though they substituted the physical, erotic experience with a spiritual, esoteric one. Bridal mysticism and sexuality curiously, but certainly powerfully, combine and complement each other. One of many examples would be the statements by the Dominican nun Mechthild von Waldeck (late thirteenth century) who confessed: Christ wants to “werlich mit mir vereinigen” (truly unite with me), he holds her

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<sup>265</sup> Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Sarah Salih, “When is a Bosom not a Bosom? Problems with ‘Erotic Mysticism’,” *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and eadem. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 14–32.

<sup>266</sup> Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages*. Studies in Spirituality, Supplement 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), chapters 1 and 5.

<sup>267</sup> Quoted from Peter Dinzelbacher, *Körper und Frömmigkeit*, 121.

<sup>268</sup> Dinzelbacher, *Körper und Frömmigkeit*, 123.

“umvangeln mit [s]einen gotlichen armen” (with his divine arms), meaning for her: “es ist nu nicht anders, wann du mir und ich dir und das wir liplich mit ein ander kosen” (it is nothing but that you caress me and I caress you and that we both caress each other).<sup>269</sup>

The discourse of sexuality, however, and this might be the ultimate conclusion that I can offer here, permeated all aspects of medieval and early modern society, whether informed by negative or positive values. However, sexuality, as presented in the myriad of artistic and literary manifestations, for instance, cannot simply be interpreted as a simple, but lewd desire deeply determining human life. Sexuality has also always been a topic of central relevance in human epistemologically and contains numerous levels of meaning that require the viewer or listener to decipher the codes contained in the various objects. After all, we have always to take into account moral, ethical, philosophical, but then also scientific (astrological and alchemical) and medical messages. Nevertheless, we can still claim globally that the study of the history of sexuality allows us to gain deeper insight into the mental history and to grasp some of the critical elements in the power game involving both genders, but then also the relationship between an individual and the Godhead in a spiritual, perhaps mystical, experience.<sup>270</sup>

Considering the continual interest of artists throughout time to depict not only the erotic, but also, quite graphically, boldly transgressing all taboos, the sexual, we enter a new dimension in our understanding of the cultural-historical significance of this theme. Gilles Néret includes, for instance, in his at first sight somewhat shocking *Erotica universalis* most dramatic scenes reflecting copulation, all kinds of sexual positions, humorous scenes involving men and women in sexual embrace or in a ludic position, and these taken from all periods in Western history. In a fifteenth-century capital from the cloister of Champeau we see a man ejaculating (or pissing?) into a super-sized vagina, his face, impishly smiling, clearly indicating his erotic joys.<sup>271</sup> Many scenes describing the murder of a saint, for instance, are clearly predicated on the phallus, with the sword stabbed through the female body from behind serving as the metaphorical object, such as in a Speyer woodcut from 1493 (88). Sixteenth-century art did not begin to shrink back from such motifs, as the overwhelming evidence assembled by Néret indicates. For instance, in 1530, Hans Sebald Beham drew the image of a nude couple, both manipulating each other's genitals (110). And the rich, perhaps impertinent, art work by Jacques Callot (1592–1635) could make blush any prudish viewer even, if not particularly, today (82–87). However, he was absolutely not the first and certainly not the last to push this agenda ever further, as the countless examples

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<sup>269</sup> Dinzelbacher, *Körper und Frömmigkeit*, 125.

<sup>270</sup> Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 56–57.

<sup>271</sup> Gilles Néret, *Erotica universalis*, 94.

from the following centuries indicate, almost leaving us breathless in their unabashed treatment of the human body and the joys of sexuality. We could, or would have to, agree with Néret who demands a new approach to erotic art at large: "And thus the artist's studio becomes an orgiastic temple, a mystic brothel, a cathedral of the eye. And should we be forbidden access to the immortality offered by erotic joy? Can we allow museums to bury these innumerable treasures in their vaults, hiding them from the common man's sight?" (7).

Cautiously keeping in mind the conflicting arguments developed first by Norbert Elias, and then, decades later by Hans Peter Duerr, regarding the role of sexuality, the body, and shame with respect to the process of civilization, suspiciously and somewhat naively identified with 'progress,' we can now boldly posit that medieval and early modern cultures were deeply influenced, if not fundamentally determined by sexuality, although it faced most serious challenges by the Catholic Church and was publicly decried as voluptuous concupiscence and the most dangerous gateway to sinfulness, hence to Hell.

Numerous medieval sculptures depict the penalties for certain sexual transgressions by showing monstrous snakes and other creatures attacking genitals and entrails—perhaps, as Peter Dinzelbacher has suggested, all of these reflecting deep-seated fear of the genital organs and sexuality per se, which then resulted in fantasies of revenge against those people who did not subscribe to the moral teachings of the Church and freely enjoyed physical pleasures.<sup>272</sup> The more priests and other representatives of the Church battled against the temptations of sexuality and idealized chastity, it seems, the more they encountered a growing resistance on the part of the ordinary people, which also led to the development of the myth of the chastity belt, first documented in a drawing contained in Conrad Kyesser's *Bellifortis* (1405).<sup>273</sup>

But Elias and Duerr deeply disagree with each other regarding the extent to which shame in sexual matters, and elsewhere, characterized later cultures, whereas earlier ones were much more liberal in their attitude toward the exposure of the human body. It seems almost impossible to reach a final decision in such matters because the issue depends considerably on the selection of texts and objects, the specific questions raised in their interpretation, and on the social, political, and religious context. Already considerably prior to Elias's publication of his study, V. F. Calverton had perspicuously argued: "Shame is a matter of the mores, and the mores are a matter of economic conditions—a reflection of them. The mores and ideas of a tribe in the hunting and fishing stage of existence are different from those of a tribe in the pastoral stage, and both of these are different from tribes in the agricultural stage. In similar fashion, sex attitudes differ with

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<sup>272</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, "Sexualität im Mittelalter," 49–50.

<sup>273</sup> Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt*, 119–22.



different stages of economic progress, different class supremacies and rationalizations."<sup>274</sup>

Considering how much the late-medieval public spread rumors about, or explicitly accused priests and the cloistered monks and nuns of committing a breach of their own vow of chastity, lewdly seeking out sexual pleasures as well, and considering the enormously richly layered discourse of sexuality in medical, scientific, theological, erotic, artistic, and poetic discourse during the Middle Ages, we can safely put both some of Elias's and Duerr's central hypotheses to rest.<sup>275</sup> As the contributions to this volume altogether indicate, we can continue with our research on the history of sexuality relying on the solidly based assumption that this basic aspect in the life of people, whether associated with shame or not, has continually aroused the greatest interest, fascination, and intrigue, though the components of violence, money, and power, not to forget hatred, criminality, and even war, have always contributed their share in the private and public discourse of sexuality.

One of the most surprising realizations might actually be that even theological writers, and then especially mystical visionaries resorted to the imagery of sexuality in order to come to terms with the ultimate experience in human life, the *unio mystica*, whether we think of Bernard of Clairvaux's theological teachings and his revolutionizing *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum*,<sup>276</sup> Mechthild von

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<sup>274</sup> V. F. Calverton, *Sex Expression in Literature*. With an Introduction by Harry Elmer Barnes (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926), 21–22. As to the situation on the English stage in the sixteenth century, he adds: "All of these manifestations of phallic worship on the English stage during Elizabethan and Jacobean times were possible only because of the looseness of the aristocratic mores, and effect of the economic conditions of feudalism that had created just such an aristocracy" (25). His predictions as to the attitude toward sex by future generations, i.e., our own, modern generation, seem to have come true, at least in part, and in some part would have to be rejected outright: "With the coming changes in society the young people will neither be consumed by sex nor confused by its manifestations, but . . . they will 'discuss sex relations, abortions and love with the candour of obstetricians'" (309; he cites from Paul Blanchard, "Sex Standards in Moscow," *The Nation*, May 12 [1926]).

<sup>275</sup> Certainly, Elias's comments in his *The Civilizing Process*, 134, pertaining to the private bedroom and its increasing exclusivity, hidden away from public view, might have a certain value considering the developments in the last three hundred years. By the same token, many of his statements concerning this and related topics are too general and inaccurate to hold water against a critical reading. The same applies, by and large, to Duerr's approach. The role of the naked body was associated with shame in the Middle Ages, and it is associated with shame today, but in each epoch shame, the public, and even the individual carried different meanings, especially contingent upon the specific context, here not even considering the wide discrepancy of significance among the various social classes. The bed itself, for instance, has always been used in a wide variety of symbolic meanings, both spiritual and erotic, both philosophical and economic, see Karin Lechner, *Lectulus Floridus: Zur Bedeutung des Bettes in Literatur und Handschriftenillustration des Mittelalters*. *Pictura et Poesis*, 6 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 1993), especially 349–494.

<sup>276</sup> Lara Farina, *Erotic Discourse and Early English Religious Writing*. *The New Middle Ages* (New York, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 6–12, 63–86; at closer analysis,

Magdeburg's bridal mysticism, or Hadewijch's highly erotic mystical poetry.<sup>277</sup> After all, sexuality is tantamount to life, essential to life, and an expression of life; so to deny sexuality, or to reject it, also implies a rejection of the physical life, of the human body, and the beauty of the earthly experience. It did not matter how hard the traditional Church fought against and tried to subjugate all expressions of human lust, both among the laity and even within its own circles (see the discussion about sexual solicitation in the confessionals).<sup>278</sup>

As poets and artists throughout times have demonstrated, and as the numerous authors particularly of medieval and early-modern penitentials have involuntarily revealed, sexuality represents an irrepressible, hence a central force of all existence, whereas celibacy imposes artificial limitations that almost cry out for transgressions of all sorts. As a public discourse, sexuality illuminates, it transforms the individual experiencing it, then it proves to be dangerous and fascinating, irresistible and powerful, it teases and seduces, and it also offers, if it is not tantamount to, catalytic inspiration; all this, of course, always depending on the specific contexts in which sexuality surfaces and plays an important role. But there is no denial that it assumes a central position in human life. Just as with a steam cooker, the more pressure has been imposed on sexuality, the more alternatives and substitutions have been found, as the artistic and literary manifestations richly demonstrate.

Michel Foucault once stated that sexuality "is the name that can be given to a historical construct."<sup>279</sup> This has, as Andrew Weeks observes, opened up "the whole field to critical analysis and assessment. It becomes possible to relate sexuality to other social phenomena and to ask new types of questions (new at least to the field of sex research)."<sup>280</sup> This seems to be most complementary to our own approach, that is, to view sexuality as a matter of discourse, which found

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however, Farina's concept of sexuality, only vaguely circumscribed throughout her study, exhausts itself in the discussion of erotic desire refracted through the mystical perspective. She is primarily interested in the notion of "devotional sexuality," 86.

<sup>277</sup> Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 21–28; Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*. *Studies in Spirituality and Theology*, 1 (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Albrecht Classen, "Die flämische Mystikerin Hadewijch als erotische Liebesdichterin," *Studies in Spirituality* 12 (2002): 23–42; Sarah Salih, "When is a Bosom not a Bosom? Problems with Erotic Mysticism," *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Sarah Salih, and Ruth Evans. *Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 14–32.

<sup>278</sup> See the contributions to this volume by Christina Weising, Juanita Feros Ruys, Andrew Holt, Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, Sarah McDougall, and Stephanie Fink De Backer.

<sup>279</sup> See the critical examination of what Foucault's statement implied for the entire history of sexuality, irrespective of whether the content of his argument can be maintained or not, by Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 128–33.

<sup>280</sup> Andrew Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, 129.

some of its most explicit and profound manifestation in literary texts, in art work, and also in historical documents. In Katherine Crawford's words, summarizing Foucault's contribution, "patterns of language, such as confession and silencing around sexual acts, operate in complex ways within structures of power (such as the family, church, state, and science) to form sexual identity."<sup>281</sup>

However, as intriguing as Michel Foucault's definition of the domain of sexuality might read, primarily appealing to postmodern readers, it seems to miss the essential point by focusing on one of the admittedly negative side effects of sexuality:

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, and administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.<sup>282</sup>

But we would have to be careful not to consider the certainly overarching policy of the Catholic Church toward sexuality, predominant in the Middle Ages and far into the early modern age, if not even until today (despite Vatican II), as the only response to sexuality, a typical mistake both by modern sociologists, sexologists, and anthropologists.<sup>283</sup> Michel Foucault claimed, for instance, that the notion of

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<sup>281</sup> Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities, 1400–1800*. New Approaches to European History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>282</sup> Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. I: *An Introduction*, trans. from the French Robert Hurley (1976; New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 103. Not surprisingly, subsequently Foucault focuses mostly on the time since the eighteenth century, isolating the following points as "specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex" (103): "hysterization of women's bodies," "pedagogization of children's sex," "socialization of procreative behavior," and "psychiatrization of perverse pleasure" (104–05). It would be highly questionable, as has often been so fashionable, to rely on his theoretical assumptions for the discussion of the sexuality in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The scholarly debate concerning Foucault's theses is very rich, and certainly not homogenous, see, for instance, Ross Balzaretti, "Michel Foucault, Homosexuality and the Middle Ages," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 37 (1994): 1–12; David M. Halperin, "Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the Histories of Sexuality," *Representations* 63 (1998): 93–120; Arnold Ira Davidson, *The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 178–91.

<sup>283</sup> Andrew Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, 131: "We in the west are heirs of a Christian tradition which has tended to see in sex a focus for moral anguish and conflict, producing an enduring dualism between the spirit and the flesh, the mind and the body. It has produced a culture which simultaneously disavows the body while being obsessively preoccupied with it." For an excellent overview of historical perspectives regarding sexuality in the Middle Ages, see Ruth Mazo Karras, "Sexuality," 2004, 569–77; she also offers a rich bibliography, many titles of which promise

sexuality as the basis for identity formation can only be traced back to the recent past, though he by and large ignored the vast corpus of literary texts from the entire Middle Ages and at least until the end of the seventeenth century contradicting his hypothesis.<sup>284</sup> Scholars focusing on queer studies have consequently corrected his stance and demonstrated how careful we have to be when considering some of the general theories concerning cultural history, mental history, history of private life, and everyday life.<sup>285</sup> We still suffer from the many taboos imposed on the issue at stake here by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars, not to speak of the public, especially when they concern same-sex love.<sup>286</sup> Not surprisingly, then, the contributions to this volume promise many new perspectives, innovative approaches, more careful readings, more sensitive insights into highly complex texts and images, and simply more openness to all things human, both in sophisticated, elitist, and in popular, lower-class cultures.

But why study sexuality at all, we may ask one more time, bringing to a close these 'introductory' remarks. Both medieval authors and modern writers have consistently agreed that sexuality has always been a topic of central concern for human identity, the social cohesion of any given society and smaller sub-groups, especially the family, the development of moral, ethical, legal, and even political standards and norms. The same applies to artists from all cultural periods, one of the most intriguing in this regard perhaps being Martinus Opifex who worked at the court of the Emperor Frederick III and who died in 1456. In an illustration for the *Historia Troiana*, we see Achilles lying in bed, lamenting his love pangs and loneliness. But the tent flaps open up to our view, surprisingly suggestive of female genitals, undoubtedly the ultimate, sexual goal of Achilles's erotic desires.

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additional insights and more complex perceptions of specialized topics.

<sup>284</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. I: *An Introduction*, 43. For strong opposing views, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 1988; and Carolyn Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*. Lectures on the History of Religions, New Series 15 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Roy Porter, "History of the Body," *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 206–32.

<sup>285</sup> Simon Gaunt, "Straight Minds/'Queer' Wishes in Old French Hagiography: La Vie de Sainte Euphrosine," *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (London: Routledge, 1996), 155–173; here 157; Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 174; Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexual Communities, Pre- and Post-Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 194–95.

<sup>286</sup> *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices Across Cultures*, ed. Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia Wieringa. *Between Men—Between Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); see also John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard Books, 1994); *Same Sex Love and Desire Among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Francesca Canadé-Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn. *The New Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Richard E. Zeikowitz, *Homeropticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century*. *The New Middle Ages* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2003).

As Michael Camille noted: "The painted space comes to stand for the act of penetrative desire itself as our eyes delve deeper and we lose ourselves in the flower-like folds. . . . Martinus Opifex makes his image perform desire in a way that looks forward to art of later periods and in doing so goes some way to filling the emptiness that, for its anxious male subjects, came at the climax of the medieval art of love."<sup>287</sup>

Of course, on the surface this might be an anachronistic reading into the illumination because Achilles is alone in his bed and cries about that fact, but all the details, including the dagger on the ground, the folding of the flaps, and the color coordination specifically implying the location of pubic hair at the tip of the tent's opening strongly support Camille's interpretation, allowing us to perceive the not so subtle goals of the protagonist's dreams within their obviously erotic context.

The conflicts between the individual and the Church regarding the proper treatment and handling of sexuality have determined much of Western culture, whether we approach it from a religious, sociological, literary, or art-historical perspective. Marriage and childbirth have almost always been key components of most adult person's life, though monastic communities and military groups have taken exception to that. But even those who have subscribed to chastity for whatever reason had to make a very serious and deliberate choice against a basic natural instinct.

In order to understand a culture or a people, then, particularly in the past, we only need to look at the way they have handled and treated, that is, accepted, suppressed, rejected, or delimited, sexuality in order to gain an important glimpse into the essential features of that world, both from the outside and the inside. Recent tendencies to see sexuality through a Foucauldian lens as a matter of discourse, and this discourse as a representation of power distribution might be an intriguing new way of looking at the phenomenon, especially if we trace it more boldly back to the Middle Ages.<sup>288</sup> Surprisingly, we might then also perceive the chorus of whispers determining our own subconsciousness because desires run the whole gamut from the physical to the divine, the erotic to the sublime, and from the permissible to the non-permissible. After all, the human gaze finds no limits, and this despite all efforts by society, the various churches, and individuals to impose control mechanisms. Sexuality is irrepressible, hence a truly foundational force in history, and a central source of all culture, both deeply

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<sup>287</sup> Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 155. See also Charlotte Ziegler, *Martinus Opifex: Ein Hofminiatur Friedrichs III.* (Vienna: Verlag Anton Schroll & Co., 1988), plate 43. She has, however, nothing to say about this particular illumination.

<sup>288</sup> Lara Farina, *Erotic Discourse*, 3–6; see also Jacqueline Murray, "The Absent Penitent: The Cure of Women's Souls and Confessors' Manuals in Thirteenth-Century England," *Women, the Book, and the Godly*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane Taylor (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 13–25.

influencing society and determined by that very society in turn. Those who feel inclined to ignore sexuality as a fundamental force determining the cultural development at any given time deliberately turn their backs on one of the strongest motivational factors in human existence, and so also in the Middle Ages and the early modern age. We need to study sexuality both by itself, as an expression of human life, desire, and anxiety, and also as a catalyst for society or the Church to impose rules, norms, ethics, and morality in an effort to exert control and to subjugate social groups, especially women at large, not to speak of any of the many representatives of alternative sexual orientations who have existed throughout times and have made their voices heard as well. No doubt, sexuality was regarded differently in the Middle Ages and the early modern age than today, yet by the same token we must also admit that the modern world does not have any uniform concept of sexuality either. As Sarah Salih poignantly underscores: "examples such as those of Gilbert [twelfth-century St. Gilbert of Sempringham–A.C.] and Christina [of Markyate–A.C.] indicate also that medieval people were not so different that they did not sometimes have the same interpretative problems as ourselves in deciding whether sex was indeed sex and whether virgins were indeed virgins."<sup>289</sup>

#### 14. Summary Observations Regarding the Contributions

How do the contributors to this volume discuss the plethora of perspectives involved in the topics of sexuality, fertility, violence, erotic playfulness, and even pornography in the widest array of cultural contexts? After all, as one of the most powerful basic drives in human life, both in the past and in the present, sexuality comes to the fore in a plethora of manifestations, whether mystical discourse, book illustrations, architectural designs, poems, songs, and so forth, which altogether truly requires a highly interdisciplinary approach. To achieve such a goal we need the collaboration of scholars from many different fields, so I am delighted that I could assemble so many excellent studies. To give the reader a relatively quick overview, following I will briefly summarize the major aspects contained in each individual article.

The first article by Albrecht Classen represents a continuation of a particular aspect that he addresses already in the Introduction to this volume, focusing now on medieval approaches to nakedness, the issues of shame, and the cultural-moral perception of the nude body. This has a considerable bearing on the evaluation of sexuality as well, though here from an anthropological, cultural-historical angle.

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<sup>289</sup> Salih, "When is a Bosom not a Bosom?," 27.

The article attempts to contradict both Norbert Elias and Hans Peter Duerr in their efforts to identify sexuality and nudity as essential criteria to determine the transition from the medieval to the modern world as reflections of the alleged process of civilization (which Duerr denies). The author adduces literary and art-historical evidence to demonstrate how much both sexuality in public and nudity could have been associated with shame and embarrassment depending on the specific context, but could also be regarded as very normal aspects of human life. To investigate the issue at stake, Classen focuses on the curious phenomenon of the naked man in several medieval and early-modern German literary texts and in some art works.

Surprisingly, shame and embarrassment could assume significant functions, if social class transgressions were also involved, or they could be entirely absent if a poet or artist presented scenes of aristocratic or urban life styles. This also would apply to the theme of sexuality that could serve both in a satirical, aggressive context to challenge and reject representatives of the lower social classes trying to climb the ladder into the nobility. However, if social, moral, and ethical transgressions were not involved, then sexuality and nudity seem to have been accepted as normal and experiences. Sudden bodily exposure might cause laughter, but not in that framework certainly not carried by a sense of contempt or aggressive rejection. Evidence is drawn from Wolfram von Eschenbach, The Stricker, Oswald von Wolkenstein, the *Zimmern* chronicle, and a late-medieval housebook with specific illustrations of erotic bath scenes, perhaps even a brothel.

Gender has much to do with identity, given the deceptive impression that the world is divided into opposite halves. But sometimes such differences are not as clear cut as we might imagine, and both artists and writers in the early Middle Ages did not hesitate to emphasize this curious observation when they turned to the so-called wonders of the exotic East. Asa Simon Mittman and Susan M. Kim explore what gender meant for the creators of the Old English *Wonders of the East* where some of the monsters, such as the *Blemmye*, confuse the spectator's expectations and conceptual norms regarding gender identity. By gazing directly back at us, these monster figures return the spectator's gaze and confound the traditional norms that determine the common world view.

Significantly, as Mittman and Kim suggest, here we might face a very early medieval depiction of genitalia, though the visual allusions require interpretation, focusing on graphic details, the sexually charged beard, and a twisting snake pointing toward the groin. The epistemological process relies on the operation of erasure, displacement, and yet also symbolic representation. The *Blemmye's* body is naked, and yet not in a graphic manner, indicating its own male sexuality, and hiding it at the same time, representing an hermeneutic challenge that actually underlies our entire volume insofar as gender is contingent on bodily awareness and the perception of external reality, much of which is predicated on scopism.

Surprisingly, according to Mittman and Kim, the monstrous images defy our understanding of gender identity and blend the various markers of male and female, perhaps in the light of Galenic medicine that continued to exert its far-reaching influence on the entire Middle Ages and beyond.<sup>290</sup> Perplexingly, the *Blemmye*, though seemingly portraying male identity through the shape of its body, signals female sexuality through the inclusion of a triangular shape for the pudenda, which challenges the viewer's categorical approach regarding gender identity both then and today because only the male genital provides for a definitive determination, whereas the female genital escapes this exactitude even when viewed frontally.

Monsters threaten not only through their physical dominance, but also, if not most importantly, through their otherness, here specifically pertaining to their perhaps hermaphroditic sexual identity. In fact, the ambivalent depiction of the *Blemmye* reveals a considerable degree of anxiety over this question and illuminates how much already the early Middle Ages struggled hard to come to terms with gender issues in epistemological terms and projected their anxieties onto those monsters in an effort to establish their own specific subject-object relationship within their world.

Nevertheless, as Mittman and Kim underscore, the monster's gaze undermines the usual one-way perspective of the viewer onto the image and unsettles the hermeneutic hierarchy especially because the gender markers prove to be uncertain and contradictory. The directness of the *Blemmye's* stare back at us reminds us of our role as spectator and illustrates how much all perceptions, particularly of other bodies, not to speak of a monster's naked body, determine and influence our epistemological grasp of reality. Insofar as the *Blemmye* resists easy gender identification, we as viewers must realize the contingency of all what we see, introducing a remarkable sense of relativity in light of this confusingly gendered body with the head on the chest, replacing, with its eyes, female nipples or a male chest, creating a fragmentation of our identity categories and hence a sense of self-consciousness on the part of the viewer.

For Mittman and Kim, then, the realization that the appearance of the *Blemmye* in the *Wonders of the East* deeply reflects upon the Anglo-Saxon search for gender identity, subject markers on the body, and ultimately epistemological categories for the categorization and comprehension of the world surrounding the spectator of this encyclopedic text. The gaze intensively interacts with the naked and yet covered monster and finds itself delicately poised between being subject and object—a curious element of indeterminacy regarding gender in light of the overarching intention of the *Wonders* to cover every aspect of this world and to

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<sup>290</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Allison P. Coudert who discovers similar processes at play in the eighteenth century.



provide sufficient explanations. Gender, however, seems to escape this rationalizing attempt somehow, even within the Anglo-Saxon context.

Although it seems hard to imagine today that medieval members of the clergy, such as the tenth-century Benedictine canoness Hrotsvit of Gandersheim or twelfth-century Bernard of Clairvaux, unabashedly embraced the erotic discourse for religious, but also for political (Liudprand of Cremona), purposes, a critical reading of some of their texts confirms this observation easily. This also applies to many mystical texts where the experience of the Godhead is commonly expressed in erotic terms (bride-groom, marriage, physical union, etc.), perhaps because for the visionary the *unio mystica* could be described in terms of extreme happiness, almost like a religious orgasm.<sup>291</sup> Hrotsvit often discusses sexuality in her religious plays and narratives, but she does not harbor any particularly prurient interests or reveal a perverse obsession with repressed sexuality, as older scholarship tended to believe. Her texts are much more realistic and simply address sexuality as one aspect of human life, as Eva Parra Membrives observes in her contribution to this volume.<sup>292</sup>

Not that she would approve of adultery, illicit sex, pornography, or some other kinds of transgressions. In fact, she condemns them all unmistakably and harshly, and yet her approach to these problems in her protagonists' lives proves to be surprisingly discriminatory and sensitive, especially with respect to the female characters. In *Gongolf*, for instance, the saint's wife's adultery does not seem to create much anger on his part, whereas her public denial of it, a lie, proves to be most damaging and leads to her harsh punishment in an ordeal. On the other hand, the wife's lover dies a violent death, meted out by God Himself, apparently, as Parra Membrives's analysis reveals, because his motivation was purely sexual,

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<sup>291</sup> See the study by Peter Dinzelbacher (with an excellent critical review of the relevant research literature), "Über die Körperlichkeit der mittelalterlichen Frömmigkeit," id., *Körper und Frömmigkeit in der mittelalterlichen Mentalitätsgeschichte* (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, and Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007), 11–49. Cf. also Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine*; Jeffrey John Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>292</sup> See also the study by Ulrike Wiethaus, "Pulchrum Signum? Sexuality and the Politics of Religion in the Works of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim Composed Between 963 and 973," *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: Contexts, Identities, Affinities, and Performance*, ed. Phyllis R. Brown, Linda A. McMillin, and Katharina M. Wilson (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 125–43. Her argument points in a different direction, not necessarily supportable: "'femininity' as a positively coded abstraction did not exist for her. What Hrotsvit explores and even celebrates in her writings is only the patriarchal Christian idea of womanhood, defined as female strength in the service of male sexual ownership, female eloquence in the service of Christian ideology, female loyalty unto death to male authority figures who insist on their power over them" (135). Significantly, she does not address the same texts as Eva Parra Membrives does in her contribution to this volume.

whereas the adulterous wife committed the sin with the other man (Clericus) out of love. Therefore she does not die, though she still suffers a most humiliating destiny. The man is depicted as the seducer, as obsessed by sex alone, whereas she simply falls in love and responds to his wooing only. In other words, Hrotsvit pursues a gender-specific differentiation in her moral and ethical evaluations of sexual transgressions.

In *Basilius*, the situation seems to be quite different because here a daughter refuses to obey her father who wants his daughter to commit her life to God and to enter a convent, preserving her virginity until her death. But she loves a young man, indirectly desires a sexual experience as well, and marries, but then has to learn that her husband has signed a pact with the devil. She initiates his purification and testing, but then Saint Basilius has to intervene as well and liberates the man from the devil's clutches. The young woman remains scot-free and is not punished at all for her passion to marry and to enjoy a sexual life. Her husband has to go through a purification process, and does not face any subsequent penalties.

As Parra Membrives explains, both in *Gongolf* and in *Basilius*, sexuality coupled with love, at least within marriage, is regarded as acceptable, as normal, even as honorable, whereas raw sex, or the pursuit of physical pleasures all by themselves deserves to be punished severely, even with the death penalty. Of course, for Hrotsvit, a member of a convent, virginity was of the highest value, but she describes her female characters rather sympathetically, even when they engage in sexual acts, on the condition that their physical transgression be based on love.

Even though most medieval courtly romances and narratives talk intensively about erotic relationships, sexual contacts, and marriage, subsequent fertility seems to be of surprisingly little interest, irrespective of the fact that new heroes are regularly born and grow up to replace their parents' positions in life. The situation is quite different in the *Lais* by Marie de France where love and sexuality regularly result in the birth of a child. Molly Robinson Kelly examines the entire group of Marie's narratives in light of this observation and offers remarkable insights into the specific concerns by this outstanding late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman poet with respect to sexuality and fertility. Of course, Marie focuses on courtly love in every instance, but she also adds a new dimension to it by examining the biological consequences of the sexual act. Children and family relations play an important role in Marie's world, but there is no guarantee that those relations are harmonious and free of conflicts. In fact, at times children are rejected for social reasons, and at other times enjoying sex with a partner proves to be a sign of personal failure, lack of self-control, and ignorance of the protagonist's social obligations. As Kelly indicates, failure to pursue sexuality in a proper fashion, that is, against the social norms and conditions, can lead to the protagonists' death, as is the case in *Equitan*.

At the same time, Marie reveals in several of her *lais* how familiar she was with basic needs of baby care, such as nursing, and how explicitly sexuality had to be discussed in public in order to establish harmonious marriages. Although she refers to some extra-marital affairs, most of the time the *lais* conclude with a happy marriage and hence frankly and approvingly incorporate the theme of sexuality within the literary discourse, such as in the case of *Lanval* despite, but perhaps just because of, its obviously utopian character. Here the joys of sexuality are openly celebrated and described as the foundation of the protagonists' future relationship, although we are not informed about any kind of fertility. Lanval's experience of fulfilled sexuality, coupled with passionate love, guarantees him protection from social conflicts and secures his future happiness.

In some other *lais* the young people's failures or incompetence to live up to their social obligations find a remarkable expression in the total absence of fertility, such as in *Les Deus Amanz*, where sexuality is, so to speak, 'wasted' when the magical potion is spilled on the mountain top after both protagonists have died.

The opposite can also be the case when a sexual relationship leads to fertility, even if the old husband is not the father. The child demonstrates who really should have joined in marriage, and in this sense, as Kelly underscores, sexuality serves as a reflection of how to establish functioning, hence happy, marital relationships (*Yonec* and *Milun*). Fertility, hence the birth of children, signals whether two lovers have found each other and have, or should, form a new partnership, a bond based on fulfilled sexuality. In this sense, we can read the *Lais* as a narrative forum where not only individual emotions, but specifically sexuality forms the basis of a public discourse about the ideal way to achieve happiness.

This happiness is regularly disturbed and thrown off balance when a third partner enters the scene, and only when that partner is eliminated, can happiness be restored, which results in fertility. With this reading Kelly is in a good position finally to explain the meaning of *Eliduc* where the new couple abstains from sexuality and ultimately turns to God, just as Eliduc's first wife had done, whereby the triangular relationship is resolved in the union with God, which makes further fertility unnecessary.

In a curiously bashful manner scholars have for much too long studied medieval courtly romances and love poetry from a highly esoteric, abstract perspective, not paying adequate attention to the concrete, if not graphic, allusions to and discussions of sexuality.<sup>293</sup> Whereas Molly Robinson Kelly has shed significant light on biological consequences of courtly love in the *Lais* by Marie de France, that

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<sup>293</sup> Ulrich Müller, "Neidharts Pastourellen der 'Manessischen Handschrift'," 74, rightly protests against traditional arguments according to which medieval courtly poetry developed from a 'classical,' perhaps esoteric idealism to a late-medieval realism with all kinds of sordid implications.

is, fertility, hence progeny, or children, Christopher R. Clason invites us to examine the most realistic dimension of eros in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (ca. 1210). The entire romance is predicated on the striving for love, though each individual and each couple achieves its goal/s differently, if at all. Nevertheless, as the narrative development illuminates, each time love blooms it also results in sexual encounters. For Clason the key question proves to be how this sexual aspect is evaluated and what role it fundamentally plays in the evaluation of the various love relationships. In other words, nineteenth-century purist approaches to medieval texts have simply blinded us to the open, uninhibited evaluation of sex as critical for the ethical assessment of the lovers. For Tristan's parents, Rivalin and Blancheflûr, the sexual experience proves to be the panacea to rescue both, in each person's own terms, from the clutches of death, and quickly takes them to a level of self-fulfillment that could only be described as happiness. Unfortunately, their joy lives only briefly, since subsequent mistakes in handling military and political challenges soon lead to their downfall and death.

By contrast, King Mark and his wife Isolde, though bonded together through matrimony, do not share any erotic emotions, though he enjoys her body as her legally married husband. As the first wedding night (surreptitiously with Brangæne) indicates, the king does not understand the relationship between eros and sexuality, and will remain trapped in a world of material hermeneutics, incapable of perceiving the intimate and fundamental bond connecting the physical with the spiritual. He might have an inkling of this when he ardently gazes down upon his wife lying in bed together with Tristan in the love cave, but for Mark, being a representative of the ordinary person, not privileged to share the divine experience of the love triggered by the magical potion, the sexual remains what it is. The king never fully grasps love's underlying spiritual dimension because, as Clason underscores, for him sex serves only for his self-gratification.

Ultimately, only the love shared by Tristan and Isolde, which finds its glorious fulfillment in their sexual unions, especially in the love cave, emerges as the absolute ideal pursued by Gottfried in this most sophisticated version of the *Tristan* tradition. Significantly, as Clason remarks, the poet does not delve into graphic descriptions of their love making and keeps a shroud of secrecy over the couple's meetings throughout the romance, though not out of a sense of shame and embarrassment, since nothing held Gottfried back in this regard when he described the love relationship of Tristan's parents. The narrative only now refrains from exposing the physical elements because the experience of sexuality between Tristan and Isolde radically goes beyond the physical and elevates the two lovers onto an allegorical, spiritual level. They are driven by an ardor that at first sight might be very similar to the one dominating the king, but in reality it is a passion divinely inspired, as their withdrawal into the love cave and their eternal suffering after their forced separation indicate. This ardor, then, transcends the physical limitation of sexuality and transforms it into a catalyst to experience the

divine. As it turns out, Clason's careful reading uncovers the pervasive force of sex throughout Gottfried's romance, though it assumes different functions for each couple. Reading sex, then, proves to be a profound way to grasp the epistemological, ultimately spiritual, messages contained in *Tristan*.

One of the many difficulties in coming to terms with the true meaning of sexuality in whatever medium both in the Middle Ages and far beyond, if not at all times and in all cultures, rests in the complexity and ambivalence of the human language. When does an image, an allusion, a phrase, a metaphor, a simile, or a comparison suddenly lose its superficial innocence and assume a sexual dimension? When does the innuendo, which always seems to lurk in the margin, make its surprise appearance?

These are fundamental questions for all of us, and Siegfried Christoph offers an impressive tour-de-force through the hermeneutic forest of critical analysis regarding how to identify when, to pick up on his final thought with its great metaphor, a cigar is just a cigar, and when it symbolizes something else.<sup>294</sup> In fact, reflecting upon sexual innuendoes proves to be tantamount to analyzing the specific meaning of a human expression in all of its multiple levels of epistemology and suddenly realizing that the discussion has centered already for a long time on the erotic, if not the sexual, a fundamental of all human existence.

Does a latch and an outside opener, such as in the case of the love cave described by the narrator in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, refer to sexual organs or not? What happens at the end of the *Roman de la rose*? And what are we to make of the many allusions to food metaphors in the Old French *fabliaux*? Who is truly entitled to decipher the linguistic ambiguity in its historical context from a modern perspective? Since the enjoyment of reading is timeless, and it would be utterly inappropriate to limit the reading of medieval texts, for instance, to an audience that is intimately familiar with medieval culture and languages. Can we read erotic jokes into medieval narratives, perhaps even with the insights in mind that Freud had provided for us? Must we demonstrate the same responses to jokes that are explicitly integrated into a medieval text as the contemporary audience?

Christoph rightly urges us to distinguish between various dimensions of meaning in every text or art work, and to be extremely careful in the socio-cultural interpretation, without, however, falling back to an excessively prudish approach as in the nineteenth century. Nor should we demonstrate a prurient interest in

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<sup>294</sup> Here I draw from the concept of fiction as a forest as developed by Umberto Eco, *Im Wald der Fiktionen: Sechs Streifzüge durch die Literatur. Harvard-Vorlesungen (Norton-Lectures 1992-93)*, trans. from the Italian by Burkhart Kroeber (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1994), 15. See also the English translation, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

erotic scenes when the context reveals an entirely different purpose, such as in the case of corbels, gargoyles, and misericords in medieval churches.<sup>295</sup>

In fact, sexuality and the enjoyment of the human body seem to have faced considerably less inhibitions in the premodern world than we might think today, though the intentions seem to have been multifarious; and here innuendo comes in again and forces us to perceive the slippery road between one potential implication and another. Moreover, innuendo impressively intensifies the fascination exerted by a narrative, art work, or even musical composition, allowing the reader/listener, or spectator to visualize, to imagine, and to speculate as to the implied or not implied messages. The charm and intrigue rest in the breathless pause, or, to use deliberately a suggestive pun in our context, in the pregnant limbo between innocence and knowledge of the flesh. Considering these observations, we can fully agree with Christoph that the distinctions between obscenity and sexuality, between perversion and lustfulness, between moral and immoral, etc., prove to be rather fluid and dependent on the individual perspective, experience, and expectations.<sup>296</sup>

After all, innuendo might well be one of the crucial instruments in the playful epistemology all sexual discourse is predicated on. Only because of innuendo, which signals a certain degree of ignorance and also a specific extent of intimate insightfulness with ever shifting balances, the audience is invited to participate in the creative act and to explore on its own the full depth of the narrative or art work. The limit proves to be, as so often, only our own imagination, and laughter indicates that the breaking point has been reached because the audience has suddenly realized the performative character of the play, poem, romance, painting, or musical composition.<sup>297</sup> Once the audience has picked up the author's, the composer's, or the artist's nod to participate in the epistemological realization, a true community of intellectual and/or emotional equals has been developed who are invited to laugh with the creator about the implied sexual meaning, or the pun, the allusion, or simply the double meaning just by itself. Christoph thus alerts us once again of the fundamental need to embrace the discourse of sexuality in the Middle Ages and the early modern age as one of the many truly important epistemological avenues that shaped that past culture.

In a volume dedicated to the topic of sexuality from an interdisciplinary perspective, it would be a great loss if the musical component of love poetry would not be addressed as well. After all, most, if not all, medieval courtly love

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<sup>295</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Christina Weising.

<sup>296</sup> See particularly the contributions to this volume by Christina Weising, Sarah Gordon, and Connie Scarborough.

<sup>297</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Transgression and Laughter, the Scatological and the Epistemological: New Insights into the Pranks of Till Eulenspiegel," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 33 (2007): 41-61.

poetry was predicated on an intimate interrelationship of words and sounds, although most literary scholars are not well prepared to deal with the second component. But poetry constitutes performance, which involves text, gestures, a variety of dramatic elements, and of course music.<sup>298</sup> Julia Wingo Shinnick, following Siegfried Christoph's more theoretical and literature based reflections, examines the Old French song "Bele Ysabiauz," a *chanson de toile* by Audefroï le Bâtard, and the Old Occitan song "Lo ferm voler" by Arnaut Daniel in light of the sexual innuendoes implied in the musical structures.

The first poem describes the tragic development in the relationship of a young couple who have to separate because her parents marry her off to another man. But before the male lover Gerard departs on a crusade, he encounters his lady Ysabiauz one more time, and they suddenly embrace each other passionately, falling to the ground. When her husband unexpectedly comes across this scene, he is so shocked about the presumed death of his wife that he dies from grief. This frees Ysabiauz, making it possible for her to marry her true love.

The musical composition strongly supports the narrative development, as Shinnick demonstrates through a careful analysis of the stanzas, the neumes, pitches, syllables, and the refrain. Although none of the melismas contain more than five pitches, Shinnick underscores how much the musical structure lent itself for the audience imagining the erotic, if not specifically sexual, content of the song, the innuendo being created mostly through the musical development.

In Arnaut Daniel's canso "Lo ferm voler," which was deeply admired by many late-medieval poets, including Dante and Petrarch, the directness of the language and narrative treatment of sexuality finds its full confirmation through the intensively syllabic musical setting by which Daniel succeeded in closely correlating text and music, creating a new type of song, only later called *sestina*, specifically drawing from the technique of repeating the rhyme words. These all carry noteworthy sexual meaning, as literary scholarship has often commented on, but Shinnick takes the additional step to examine more closely how the musical arrangement supports the textual messages, surprisingly openly addressing the singer's desire for sexual pleasures with his lady.

Here innuendo perfectly assists in grasping the poet's/composer's strategy insofar as the musical gestures evoke allusions, associations, and evocations, ultimately exploding into dramatic sexual suggestions. Shinnick points out how

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<sup>298</sup> See the contributors to *Music and German Literature: Their Relationship since the Middle Ages*, ed. James M. McGlathery. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1992); and to *The Union of Words and Music in Medieval Poetry*, ed. Rebecca A. Baltzer, Thomas Cable, and James I. Wimsatt (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991). For a fundamental introduction, see James V. McMahon, *The Music of the Early Minnesang*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbus, SC: Camden House, 1990); Achim Diehr, *Literatur und Musik im Mittelalter: Eine Einführung* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2004).

easily a singer could realize these innuendoes by way of melodic gestures, supported by vocal inflection, facial expressions, and bodily movement. Her analysis convincingly demonstrates how the musical progression directly reflects the growth of the singer's sexual desires, which he communicates to his lady quite openly in his text. There is no bashfulness or a tentative, hesitating wooing; instead both words and the melody specifically address the erotic intentions and support each other in this operation.

Generally, courtly songs were performed in public and constituted courtly culture in many different ways. Shinnick's study therefore allows us to gain additional perspectives regarding the performative nature of sexuality in the premodern world. But her observations also alert us to a critical aspect in most musical presentations that heavily rely on innuendoes as part of the dramatic enactment. Undoubtedly, this realization could also be applied to modern music, or songs, but it particularly applies to medieval poems in their melodic structure.

As has been well established by now, sexuality was a topic of considerable significance in the discourse of the Middle Ages and the early modern age. And it found sometimes most curious reflections and expression in art objects, such as *misericords* underneath the seats in the wooden choir stalls of Gothic churches,<sup>299</sup> or in corbels on the outside underneath the cornice, then carved into stone. Many corbels contain astoundingly graphic images, grotesquely obscene, as the modern viewer might think. However, much depends on the context, the time, and the cultural conditions, as Christina Weising argues in her contribution, focusing on the corbels to be found in the Midi, or Southern France. She begins with a comparative analysis, contrasting the corbels to be found in Aquitaine and Northern Spain, which almost overwhelm the viewer with exposed nude bodies, explicit presentation of the genitals, lifting of clothes to achieve that end, and contortions of the naked body, with those in the Midi. Some of the corbel carvings can be interpreted fairly easily, signaling clear warnings against sexual sinfulness, luxuria, lechery, and concupiscence. Examples for these can also be found in the British Isles and Ireland, and other places in medieval Europe.

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<sup>299</sup> Louis Maeterlinck, *Le Genre Satirique, Fantastique et Licencieux dans la Sculpture Flamande et Wallonne. Les Misericordes des Stalles* (Paris: Schemit, 1910); Dorothy and Henry Kraus, *The Hidden World of Misericords* (London: Joseph, 1976); Christa Gössinger, *The World Upside Down. English Misericords* (London: Harvey Miller, 1997); Juanita Wood, *Wooden Images: Misericords and Medieval England* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), photographs by Charles A. Curry. For corbels, see Michael James Swanton, *The Roof-Bosses and Corbels of Exeter Cathedral* (Newton Abbot, Devon: Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral, 1979); Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France, 13th–16th Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); eadem, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords. Iberia. Portugal-Spain, XIII–XVI Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004); eadem, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: Belgium and the Netherlands* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).



The Midi seems to have been, at first sight at least, a zone where only few corbels show truly obscene images, or figures. However, numerous others contain strong sexual motifs, such as those showing acrobats, mermaids, naked bottoms, female nude busts, and sheela-na-gigs who brutally exhibit and expose their genitals. It almost seems as if the corbels in Aquitaine gloomily served to warn sternly against sexual sins, whereas in the Midi the artists might have enjoyed more freedom to play with sexual themes without necessarily following specific religious symbolism. But Weising warns us from generalizations, and instead encourages us to consider the context and cultural-historical framework for each individual example. Mermaids, for instance, represented a recurring motif even in later centuries when increasingly women were depicted rather realistically in a variety of art forms. Concomitantly, some sexual motifs on corbels prove to be borrowings from classical antiquity with its much more liberal attitude toward the body and sexuality. Further, even in rather shocking cases where a corbel belongs to the group of sheela-na-gigs, the concrete location of the sculpture on the building could suggest, apart from the apotropaic function, a hidden reference to ancient fertility lore, with the vulva serving as the entrance and exit port for all life, hence as the passage of all human existence. We must also not exclude the possibility, as Weising proposes, that literary texts, such as the erotic songs by the *troubadours*, might have exerted a noticeable influence on the artists who were seemingly freer in the selection of their motifs than their colleagues in Northern Spain and Aquitaine, and elsewhere.

Final answers as to how to interpret medieval corbels that regularly display naked bodies, and in some areas even images concretely identifiable as obscene in their display of sexual intercourse, cannot be expected at all because the range of possibilities seems endless. This would actually confirm some of the fundamental aspects we have observed above regarding the wide spectrum of purposes, reasons, meanings of, and intentions with sexuality in the pre-modern world. Its discursive character, as described theoretically by Foucault, finds also powerful expression in the corbels of the medieval Midi which contain a whole spectrum of different types of sexual scenes, some of which can be interpreted religiously (apotropaic), others anthropologically (folk tradition), some purely aesthetically (individual choice by the artists who were less bound by the patron's requirements), and some as direct copies from Roman antiquity.

Famous Heloise, erstwhile student and mistress of highly admired Abelard, formulated some of the most fascinating insights into female sexuality, though, as Juanita Feros Ruys clearly states, we could not read those statements contained in her letters to her husband simply as autobiographical in the modern sense of the word. On the contrary, the sexual discourse proves to be deeply steeped in the monastic rhetorical tradition and served Heloise exceedingly well to defend herself against male accusations of female weakness. As Ruys can demonstrate rather

convincingly, both Heloise's letter (*Ep. IV*), and so Abelard's (*Ep. V*) draw from the discourse on nocturnal emissions as developed by Cassian (*Conference*) and engage critically in the questions on the function and relevance of sexual desires within oneself, certainly an issue of considerable importance for all members of monastic communities that continuously faced—and this seems to be one of the fundamental issues of Christianity at large—the dangers of sexual temptations.

Ruys thereby contextualizes Heloise's comments within a much deeper rhetorical discourse reaching as far back as to the Church Fathers, and continuing to experience extensive and careful treatment by the theological writers of Heloise's time. In other words, she is not at all the only one to reflect upon sexual desires, particularly at night, in the loneliness and silence of her cell, which does not, however, transform those comments into autobiographical confessions. Of course, saying this does not exclude that aspect either, yet it is of considerably less significance than previously assumed. Instead it could be used as an indirect invective against others who are guilty of those sins but do not confess them.

But Ruys goes one step further in her analysis of Heloise's alleged sexual confessions because she alerts us, first, to the fact that traditionally warnings against nocturnal emissions exclusively addressed, for simple physiological reasons (erection and ejaculation), male clerics. Second, Heloise skillfully appropriates this rhetorical tradition for her own purposes and insists that women are also to be treated as sexual beings, suffering from similar, if not the same, temptations, fantasies, etc.; hence she argues that these secret, male desires can also affect women. In other words, Heloise re-gendered that monastic discourse and thereby positioned herself and her female community much more centrally within the framework of the Catholic Church, which subsequently led her to address feminine needs (i.e., menstruation) that had to be dealt with by monastic rules, for instance.

The really revolutionary approach to the issue, however, proves to be, as Ruys emphasizes, Heloise's utilization of *memoria* to reflect upon her past experiences of sexual desires for Abelard which are, intriguingly, as a consequence valorized positively as Heloise's realization of the interaction between the external and the internal aspects of her self. However, whereas the male discourse established a sharp demarcation between both external and internal (fantasy vs. bodily reaction, nocturnal emission), thereby identifying the sexual sensation as sinful, Heloise turns this strategy on its head and claims that through her *memoria* she reconnects her heart (the seat of her love) with her sexual desires, removing that demarcation and elevating herself into a state of inner and outer, hence complete harmony.

Her confession to past experiences of a sexual kind is also determined by a sense of melancholy, melancholy because of the loss of Abelard's love and his presence. Through these reflections and explicit ruminations about her interior experiences she achieves a new consonance of body and mind, beautifully framed by memory

as the pathway to the past which is recovered here through the rhetorical discourse on sexuality.

One of the reasons why the present volume grew so much in proportion and depth has simply to do with the enormous potential of the topic of sexuality, pertaining to gender relationships, political power structures, law, religion, art, medicine, and literature. Sexuality can be associated as much with love, joy, happiness, and bliss as with violence, pain, sorrow, and suffering, depending on the context and the individual perspective. Sexuality has also much to do with imagination, either erotically evocative or frightfully scary, which means that it has always been a rather malleable tool in the hands of church propagandists, law-makers, politicians, medical doctors, and others. As James A. Brundage has demonstrated in his magisterial study *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (1987),<sup>300</sup> people in the Middle Ages and beyond dealt with practically all those aspects of sexuality as we do today, as we know, for instance, from the rich corpus of penitential literature. Peter Dinzelbacher, however, in his contribution to this volume, raises the rather surprising question whether group sex, or orgies, were also known and discussed by medieval authors.

Whereas vernacular literature before the Renaissance does not yield any significant evidence in this regard, apart perhaps from the famous poem by Guillaume le Neuf, "Farai un vers, pos mi sonelh," involving two women and one man enjoying sex together for a whole week, the medieval Church more often than not utilized the concept of group sex to identify the nefarious character of heretic groups. Dinzelbacher, extending studies of, among others, Mircea Eliade and Norman Cohn, unearths a considerable number of relevant texts, either confessions by alleged heretics in the hands of the Inquisition, or reports by church officials, that consistently describe such practices of sexual deviancy. These ritual performances could even include acts of cannibalism, which added to the monstrosity of those religious groups that did not submit under the authority of the Catholic Church.

Orgies were the *cause célèbre* for a world-spanning chaos, as the authorities saw it, and the religious prosecutors made every effort to denigrate and to transmute the alleged heretics—even including such sects as the Cathars and the Waldensians that explicitly preached against sexuality per se—as sexual perverts.

Significantly, many of those arguments regarding ritual group sex resurfaced in the early modern world during the devastating witch craze and obviously

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<sup>300</sup> See also the various studies by Vern L. Bullough, *The History of Prostitution; Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage; Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe; Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury, all cited above.

functioned equally well to cast the feared victims of the devil's manipulation, that is, witches and sorcerers, as bonded together in a chaos-oriented ritual of sexual orgies, the witches' Sabbath.<sup>301</sup> In this sense we might argue that the early-modern witch craze was not necessarily a new phenomenon, but instead a continuation of similar persecutions throughout the Middle Ages regarding deviant religious groups, or heretics, though the quantitative dimension of the persecutions in the early-modern world was considerably higher than before. To accuse them all of some kind of sexual promiscuity proved to be a most effective strategy by the Church casting them as pervers that deserved to be eradicated.<sup>302</sup>

In fact, Dinzelbacher seems to have isolated a most powerful ideological argument raised against certain religious or political minorities because even the Christians had been accused of that moral crime before the ascendancy of Christianity to state religion in the early fourth century.<sup>303</sup> No wonder that they picked up that trope themselves and turned it around to attack those religious sects that did not submit under the authority of the Catholic Church. Dinzelbacher emphasizes, however, that we do not need to concern ourselves only with questions regarding the validity of those sexual charges, as the question remains what those charges by themselves implied in religio-psychological terms.

Most important proves to be that those alleged orgies, at least according to the usual report, regularly take place in the dark and in subterranean spaces, and that group sex distances all those involved from establishing individual relationships with the other participants. Consequently, in an orgy everyone abandons typical

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<sup>301</sup> Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze*, 104–23.

<sup>302</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Holy Terror* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–41, argues in favor of a Dionysian concept that lurks underneath all of human culture, which could explain the pervasive tendency to believe that more or less secret, or underground, groups, in general minorities that might challenge the authority of the Church, practice sexual orgies. Eagleton suggests, 11: "Reason on its outer edge is demented because it seeks to possess the whole world, and to do so must override the recalcitrance of reality, the way in which it kicks back inconveniently at reason's own paranoid projects." There are probably surprisingly close and very intriguing parallels between, on the one hand, the attempts by the medieval Church to cast all those heretics as participants in nefarious orgies, which made it much easier emotionally and spiritually to persecute and kill them, and, on the other, modern-day terrorism by individuals, groups, or even the state. Identifying the hated yet perhaps not repressible minority group as fundamentally evil, whether because of its allegedly immoral and unethical behavior, or because of its sexual orientation, or simply because of its race, gender, and age, provides the basis for terrorist acts. In the Middle Ages sexual orgies represented one of, if not the, worst sin and perversion; hence to accuse the heretics of that very crime greatly facilitated the legal, religious, and moral procedures practiced by the Inquisition. For modern case studies that allow us to comprehend the analogies, see Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003); cf. also Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11*. 2nd ed. (2003; Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>303</sup> Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (Paladin: St Albans, 1976).

adult behavior and regresses into an infantile stage where simple haptic relationships suffice to meet basic sexual needs. The group leader hence allows the members to liberate themselves from the super ego, the Mother Church, and to return into the chaos of pre-civilization, a concept with most radical consequences which made both those who raised those charges and those who were warned about the heretics' participation in orgies simply shudder and shrink back from them. But it was a form of sexual utopia, at least *e negativo*, and for the Church there was nothing more to fear than just that. Quite naturally, this powerful rhetorical instrument—the charge of group sex as a sign of religious identity—was then also directed against the Muslims, and continued to be used throughout the centuries as a tool that the Church could evoke anytime it was dealing with a serious religious challenge by heretical groups or other major religions.

Hue de Rotelande created, with his late twelfth-century Anglo-Norman romance *Ipomedon*, a most surprising, until today rather puzzling text in which he openly defies the traditional norms of the genre and seems to go so far as to utilize the literary framework to have his narrator flirt with his female audience, inviting them to his house for a dalliance. In other words, Hue deliberately transgressed the literary limitation and reached out to the readers/listeners beyond the fictional dimension of his text in order to reflect upon the very nature of fictionality, as Suzanne Kocher argues convincingly in her study. There is a remarkable degree of textual pleasure contained in the poet's romance insofar as his sexual interests find expression in the sophisticated interrelationships among the protagonists, the author, and the audience.

Whereas the plot of *Ipomedon* does not offer much new material regarding the protagonist's wooing of his lady, fighting in tournaments, withholding the name to achieve a higher reputation for his deeds, etc., in all this drawing heavily from contemporary romances, the metapoetic approach proves to be most intriguing because Hue explicitly plays with sexual allusions and innuendoes. Moreover, he operates deliberately with deception, if not lies, apparently to his own delight, undermining very early in the history of the courtly romance the genre itself. The author achieves this goal also by having his narrator fall back to crude sexual language in the description of the lover's physical union, obviously trying to provoke his audience and destroy the illusion of an idyllic love affair.

Moreover, as Kocher illustrates, Hue develops a stark parody of the erotic discourse, alluding to sex in many different manners, though seemingly pursuing the ideals of chastity and modesty, which suddenly emerge as a thinly-veiled pretense to cover the real interest, that is, to achieve the lustful goals of having an affair. The narrator himself includes many sexual references to himself, putting the entire courtly value system at risk for playful purposes, perhaps, especially because he draws from the world of religious and scholarly activities and objects.

However we might interpret *Ipomedon*, Kocher convincingly demonstrates that Hue embarked on a most intriguing linguistic game predicated on sexual implications, thereby distorting all traditional elements of the courtly romance with its esoteric and refined treatment of love and, mostly deeply hidden, sexuality. In fact, despite the explicit and implicit references to sexuality, particularly with regard to an ominous letter of indulgence with its hanging seal, Hue really experiments with the many different elements of the fictional text, inviting the readers/listeners to accompany him on a rather fantastical tour through various levels of the literary account, teasing the audience with the constant flipping of author and narrator role in a shockingly sexual context. The sexual theme, however, regularly comes to the foreground when Hue facetiously invites his (female) audience to his own house, as if the literary text would have the ultimate power of achieving a pragmatic end for the poet's self-satisfaction.

It might be difficult to imagine what impact Hue's *Ipomedon* actually might have had on his audiences, but Kocher powerfully argues that here the theme of sex, crudely and almost shockingly presented in specific and concrete terms, actually serves as the basis for a highly sophisticated exploration of the epistemological meaning of a fictional text with its myriad of features, elements, figures, hermeneutic levels, metaphors, and images. Ultimately, *Ipomedon* is not about sex, as much as the narrative voice seems to indicate that. Instead, Hue seems to investigate the extent to which a traditional courtly romance could be thrown into the limelight of critical analysis at the time of its historical existence.

Any military operation that is based on a religious-ideological premise quickly faces severe internal conflicts when issues of sexuality, or the mixing of the genders within the army, threaten to confound the moral-ethical ideals, especially when the military objectives cannot be met, hence defeat looms on the horizon. This was very much the case with regard to the crusades in which only men, or knights, were supposed to participate, whereas reality was always very different. In fact, no army can properly function without a huge logistical background, and here we regularly come across many women. This regularly caused severe religious and sexual conflicts for the knights and their leaders, as Andrew Holt discusses in his contribution. The clerical arguments supporting the crusades hinged on the concept that the purification of the flesh and the expurgation of all physical sinfulness would automatically lead to spiritual holiness here on earth, hence also to military victory over the infidels. In fact, intimately in line with the Gregorian reform movement, the assumption was that God would intervene on behalf of the crusaders if they performed chastely and avoided all contacts with women.

The study of women's roles in the crusades has attracted much attention in modern historiography and gender studies because wives accompanied their husbands, many women came along as cleaning ladies, as kitchen helpers, as

prostitutes, and in many other functions essential for the well-being of an army. Holt emphasizes, however, that the proponents of the Gregorian reform had successfully characterized the celibate clergy, and hence also the celibate knight, as considerably superior to the lay person, or the 'unclean,' if not sinful warrior. Only spiritually cleansed crusaders would actually achieve their desired goals because only if they obeyed the laws stipulated by the Church would they be regarded as worthy for God's assistance against the infidels.

Curiously, while during the first crusade the presence of women did not concern the clergy much at all because victory was achieved, when military set-backs occurred during the second crusade, the question of women's involvement gained in importance since their presence seemed to be the cause of God's wrath. Holt illustrates the dialectics of these clerical argument by studying the siege of Antioch, for instance, where military success was finally achieved after the women had been expelled, but the army only faced even further problems when the Islamic enemy was strengthened by reinforcements. The Christian clergy quickly refocused their charges against the crusaders and now accused them of having had intercourse with the local women, thereby being even more deserving of God's punishment.

Indeed, once the knights had cleansed themselves of their sins, they achieved the final victory, which strengthened the clerics' global arguments against the presence of women in a crusading army. To illustrate this central point, Holt examines at length the account by Guibert of Nogent who was a radical opponent of allowing women in the crusaders' camp irrespective of the circumstances. Intriguingly, whenever the Christians suffered a new defeat, the clerical response was to point fingers at women and their sinful effect on the knights and on Christendom at large. Not surprisingly, the presence of Eleanor of Aquitaine in the crusading army, along with many other noble ladies, deeply troubled the clerics and provided them with the *cause célèbre* to explain the reasons for the Christians' failures.

More significantly, however, as Holt explicitly underlines, clerics knew just too well how effective their attack on women's sexuality as sinful would be in the ideological climate of their time. Revealingly, whatever role women assumed during any crusade, they were always blamed, whether the crusaders were victorious or had to accept defeat. As Holt confirms, twelfth-century clergy was adamant in its condemnation of women at large, accusing them almost more than ever before of being the snare of the Devil (such as in the case of Ralph Niger, above all), and this especially within the context of crusades. Their attacks against female company in the crusaders' camps served as an effective springboard for elevating themselves as superior to all lay people because of their vow of celibacy.

In the later crusades the percentage of women coming along on a crusade declined, but the criticism against and warning of women because of their sexual temptation continued to some extent. As Holt concludes, reflecting upon parallel

cases in modern times (athletics, the military), sexuality and hence women have always been regarded with great suspicion by those involved in combative sport and warfare out of fear that intimate contacts with women could lead to a decline of masculine strength. In the crusades, however, this negative attitude also served to enhance the social status of the most ardent critics, the clergy. But I could also imagine that there might have been a subliminal desire among the clerics to avenge themselves for their own, often not voluntary, self-restraint by forcing the knightly laity to abstain from sex as well, at least during a crusade.

Despite all attempts by the medieval Church, especially since the eleventh-century Gregorian reform, to impose absolute celibacy on the clergy, the reality looked very different, which never seems to have changed throughout the entire Middle Ages and beyond. The visitation records by Odo Rigaldus, the Archbishop of Rouen (1248-1275), for instance, clearly speak a vivid language as to the many transgressions and infractions the local clergy committed and what their sexual misbehavior meant both for the Church and the various local communities.

After all, as Jennifer D. Thibodeaux observes in her study, a cleric's sexual relationship with a female member of his parish, or elsewhere, had a tremendous impact on the other males in that location who regarded, not surprisingly, the priests or monks who slept with their wives or daughters as a direct threat against their own sexuality and their position within society. The Church, on the other hand, was not really interested in condemning sexuality outright under any circumstances, like the Cathars did, grudgingly acknowledging its existence because it was necessary for procreation. Within its own circles it regarded sexual temptation, as it affected its own members, as a constant test of the flesh and hence as an important challenge for the clergy to maintain its morality and chastity.

Nevertheless, many priests, and so also monks, not to exclude nuns altogether, transgressed and entertained either multiple sexual relationships, or lived in a marriage-like relationship, engendering children to the great chagrin of the church authorities. Significantly, some of the highest numbers of sexual transgressions occurred in the upper echelons of the church hierarchy, especially among the members of the administration (abbots, deacons, priors, etc.).

Thibodeaux identifies priests as having been more subject to sexual temptations than members of monastic orders because they lived within their secular community and were regularly exposed to contacts with females. This led to numerous forms of sexual relationships between the priests and the women in their parish villages, such as concubinage, promiscuity, serial monogamy, and polyconcubinage—a term coined by Thibodeaux. This implied that these priests pursued a new type of sexual identity categorizable neither as hetero- nor homosexual. Instead they entered sexual relationships that were completely outside of the bonds of marriage, yet placed them in various types of frameworks in which they could live out their sexual needs, meaning that they sometimes no



longer represented a threat to the other adult males in the community when they were engaged in a steady concubinage. If they pursued, however, polyconcubinage, they exerted considerable sexual pressure on the other males because they claimed to possess a stronger male sexuality than all others.

In many cases priests deliberately resorted to sexual affairs with prostitutes, or other loose women on whom they could rely to spread the news about the priest's manliness in the form of gossip, and thereby established a type of sexual hegemony over all other men in the village. In order to grasp the social and political issues associated with these sexual practices, Thibodeaux suggests that we identify that priestly behavior as an attempt to establish a new form of sexual identity both outside of the framework set up by the Church for the clergy (celibacy) and outside of the bonds of marriage. As much as the Church tried hard to impose its rules of total sexual abstinence, the clergy never fully, if ever consistently, abided them; instead numerous members of the clergy also pursued sexuality, as both historical and literary-historical evidence confirms, and established thereby their own form of sexual identity.

One of the critical challenges of this entire volume consists in raising the issue whether and how we can identify sexual desires as expressed by women in the Middle Ages and beyond. Medieval poets regularly faced the aporia of keeping in mind the basic teachings promulgated by the Church Fathers who clearly espoused highly traditional, patriarchal attitudes toward women, and the actual interests of their female audiences and patrons who naturally did not want to be confronted with female protagonists who cannot live out their own feelings and desires. Stacey L. Hahn proposes in her contribution to this volume that the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle can serve extraordinarily well to probe this issue considerably deeper because here we come across many different female characters who enjoy various types of love relationships. Whereas Guinevere, as King Arthur's wife, enjoys the highest respect and admiration for her social role and character, many other outstanding women at the court make deliberate and forceful efforts to equal her and to reach the goal of achieving similar individual happiness by finding a lover with whom they can realize their sexual desires.

Particularly in the *Prose-Lancelot* female protagonists express most openly their sexual desires, which are regularly directed at the highest esteemed knight at court. Concomitantly, Guinevere emerges as the one woman who can freely enjoy sexuality with her lover Lancelot within certain limits because of her high-ranking social position and the rather typical phenomenon that she has never to experience pregnancy. So there are no visible, or physical, consequences of her affair, such as in the case of Tristan and Isolde (in Bérout's version), and many other courtly protagonists.

The Lady of the Lake supports Lancelot in his love relationship by showering him with her maternal love, which then also extends to the queen. By contrast,

Arthur's half-sister, the Fai Morgain, displays only vengefulness, self-centeredness, and greed, which lead her to operate as the negative counter-part of the Lady of the Lake. Situated between both women we find Guinevere who does not really love the king with any erotic passion, though both enjoy a tepid form of friendship, and she experiences the awakening of her sexuality only with the arrival of Lancelot at the court.

As Hahn illustrates, this amorous and sexual relationship finds full approval by the narrator in the early portion of the cycle, especially because the queen moves very carefully and assumes the active part in establishing the relationship, once Galehaut has brought them together for the first tryst. Moreover, the Lady of the Lake assists them both to realize their goals, sending them the Split Shield as an emblem of their love's consummation, which makes the Shield whole again—a powerful object characterized by its thinly veiled innuendo and also, if our modern fantasy does not deceive us here, a strong sexual symbol.<sup>304</sup> At the same time, this Lady of the Lake proves to be independent of male power and reigns in her own territory shielded from male influence, though she also has an *ami* and so knows of sexuality from personal experiences.

Early on her virginity is emphasized in order to make it clear that her protection of Lancelot is altruistic and maternal—the Lake is associated with the virgin goddess Diana and the Lady of the Lake learns her magic from Merlin without sacrificing her virginity. However, at the moment when the Lady of the Lake discusses love with Guinevere when she has come to cure Lancelot of madness, she mentions her boyfriend and says that, in order to allay suspicions, she told this boyfriend that Lancelot was her nephew!

Yet other women, as Hahn alerts us in her careful reading of the *Prose Lancelot*, simply employ sexuality to achieve their personal goals and that of their family or people, thus prostituting themselves for political ends, such as in the case of the False Guinevere who utilizes a magic potion to gain control over Arthur. As the narrative makes clear, love and sex that are functionalized for political and military purposes ultimately lead to the protagonists' downfall, whereas altruistic love is rewarded with sexual fulfillment and personal happiness, as the early relationship between Lancelot and the queen indicates. Nevertheless, adultery and deception soon enter the picture and undermine the idyllic situation, thereby destroying the initial happiness.

Women's erotic desire and sexual arousal are triggered regularly when the knight is in a vulnerable stage and in need of help, which might relate to women's maternal instinct. Many times this is expressed through the metaphorical role of women as medical doctors, such as in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*.<sup>305</sup> But

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<sup>304</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph.

<sup>305</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Christopher R. Clason; cf. also Peter Meister, *The Healing*

sometimes women's love for Lancelot, such as in the case of Amite, the mother of Galaad, leads to their catastrophic failure because the man cannot reciprocate that love, and the temporary effects of a love potion do not achieve their long-term goals, which reminds us of the tragic destiny of the notorious Dido figure in the *Roman d'Eneas* and its German counterpart by Heinrich von Veldeke.

Morgain, on the other hand, represents the woman whose amatory and sexual desires have been rejected and who has therefore translated all her erotic feelings into hatred and enmity against Queen Guinevere because she rightly suspects her of having an affair with Lancelot whereas she herself might be in love with the latter.

In other words, the *Prose Lancelot* is deeply determined by female characters who pursue different avenues to achieve individual happiness, erotic and sexual fulfillment, and to establish a power position for themselves within Arthurian society. Hahn underscores that the narrative embraces sexuality as an important, though certainly not exclusionary, goal of all intrapersonal relationships in their endeavor to find the way toward God, and this precisely also for women. As her analysis reveals, female sexual desire apparently could meet with approval by male writers, depending, of course, on the context. And the *Prose Lancelot* emerges as a remarkable example for the public discourse on female sexuality, though from a male perspective, yet one rather independent of the position traditionally espoused by the Church.

More than any other literary genre in the Middle Ages, the *fabliaux*, and so related genres as well, such as the *mære* and the *novella*, transgress common norms and create humorous scenes often predicated on rather graphic sexuality. As Sarah Gordon demonstrates in her contribution to this volume, this humor in many cases draws from the comic aspects associated with food and pursues its digestible character in light of human need for sexual gratification. In fact, eating and sexual activities repeatedly emerge as almost identical in their narrative functions. But Gordon argues that the *fabliaux* authors did not simply intend to evoke sexual imagery and themes with their references to foodstuff and eating. Instead, as so often in humorous narratives, the laughter aimed for also serves to teach important lessons in morality, ethics, and even in epistemology, concerning aspects such as how to perceive and interpret reality properly and to see through deceptive strategies.

Culino-erotic comedy is predicated on a variety of semantic levels, including social criticism, moral and ethical concerns, and the discussion of human weaknesses in physical terms (gluttony, excessive desire for sex, etc.). As Gordon

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*Female in the German Courtly Romance*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 523 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990).

illustrates in her paper, individual foodstuffs served particular purposes, representing male or female genitalia, sexual acts, bodily fluids, etc. This opened the floodgates for medieval authors and their audiences to play on the wide range of sexual allusions triggered by specific food objects. Contrary to the dominant impression of medieval courtly society as determined by the esoteric ideals and norms as formulated and practiced by King Arthur and the knights of the Round table, the *fabliaux* illustrate the extent to which, via playing with food imagery and symbolism, the corporeal, sexual, and erotic also found rich and vocal expression at the courts and elsewhere. Ultimately, the purpose of the food eroticism lies somewhere else, but the comic invites the readers to probe deeper the complex structure and nature of the courtly world, which also included, of course—how could we have overlooked that?—sexuality in its myriad manifestations.<sup>306</sup> As to be expected, but still important to note in our larger context, this culinary comedy provides a strategy for male authors to reflect upon female sexual desires and to reflect upon their own role within the interrelationships among the genders.

In addition, as Gordon abundantly demonstrates, the food-comedy powerfully indicates how skillfully some of the *fabliaux* authors knew how to utilize word play and linguistic puns in order to voice anticlerical statements, political protests, and moral complaints. Foodstuff, employed symbolically, suddenly reveals its rich potential to communicate a wide range of human needs and concerns, and allows the individual protagonists to engage in relationships with the other gender that would otherwise not have been possible. Occasionally, the humorous scenes also reflect upon deep-seated fear of female sexuality by the male counterparts, who more than once become objects of ridicule and abuse at the hands of women. Altogether, as Gordon's study highlights, the treatment of food within a sexual context reveals the complexity of human interactions on many different levels. It serves, in other words, a powerful epistemological function because the culinary comedy invites laughter from all sides of the audience.

In the early fourteenth-century *chanson de geste*, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, sex change and religious conversion intimately go hand in hand in the episode involving Blanchandine and Clarinde, a most unusual narrative plot that Paula Leverage examines in greater detail because of its curious focus on sexuality as an identity marker. Instead of embracing recent interpretive endeavors to perceive a queering happening in the text, or same sex desire between two women, she argues that the

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<sup>306</sup> See also Wendy Pfeffer, "Christmas Gifts in Medieval Occitania: Matfre Ermengaud's Letter to His Sister" (517–25); Richard Traxler, "Uncourtly Texts in Uncourtly Books: Observations on MS Chantilly, Musée Condé 475" (679–92), *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness: Selected Papers from the Eleventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 29 July–4 August 2004, ed. Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006).

sexual transformation of the female figure Blanchandine needs to be read from a primarily religious perspective. Blanchandine, member of a larger family descended from Tristan de Nanteuil, upon whom this *chanson de geste* focuses primarily, physically transforms into a man, which the women at court clearly observe when s/he steps nakedly into a bath, making her/his marriage with the Saracene princess Clarinde and the latter's impregnation possible. The entire scene proves to be closely associated with the concept of baptism. First, Blanchandine herself is converted to Christianity and then baptized while in prison, and she, once transformed into a man, subsequently brings about Clarinde's baptism, which in turn leads to the baptism of scores of Saracens. As Leverage observes, the physical change from woman to man, here concretely described also in its sexual dimension, has to be seen in direct correlation with the conversion of all the Saracens involved into Christians.

The baptism is regularly associated with a suddenly appearing deer that abruptly changes the conditions, making it possible, for instance, for Blanchandine to escape death threats. The religious symbolism and allusions to Christ via the stag cannot be overlooked, associating the sacrament of the eucharist and of baptism with sexual transformation. In fact, the author focuses heavily on the intricate correlation of the physical with the spiritual and does not hesitate to illustrate this important epistemological strategy by way of integrating references to human sexuality and the possibility of a total gender reversal.

Although we cannot clearly determine the audience of *Tristan de Nanteuil*, its reliance on a traditional genre and playful elements borrowed from the literary theme of cross-dressing—at that time certainly a most reprehensible operation, at least for the Church—point to jongleurs as the performers of this poem who had founded, at least in northern France, religious confraternities. Despite the highly provocative sexual theme, this *chanson de geste* addresses fundamental concerns for members of the Church and translated those into pragmatic, literary elements that could easily bring home the essential theme of religious conversion by way of presenting a physical, sexual, transformation.

Leverage refers to a number of performances of *chansons de geste* to monks and lay people on high feast days, suggesting that the Blanchandine and Clarinde episode in *Tristan de Nanteuil* might well have served as a literary medium to translate basic religious ideals into a mundane, yet still religiously inspired theme. After all, while the teachings of the Christian Church demanded a high level of intellectual abstraction, this *chanson* facilitated, through its facetious, sexual-religious treatment of transgression, transformation, and conversion, the concrete understanding of the miraculous eucharist and the subsequent process of baptism. In fact, as Leverage underscores, the narrative plot could well have served to emphasize particular feast days, shedding important light on the intimate relationship of the spiritual with the secular in the late Middle Ages, openly

embraced by the Church as a pragmatic means to reach out to the laity for whom much of the glamour of traditional Christianity had lost its meaning.

Sexuality sometimes enjoyed, perhaps not so surprisingly, a central role in the pictorial programs of medieval Gothic churches or cathedrals, and in corresponding illuminated manuscripts. Alexa Sand introduces us to the stunning iconography of the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book with its particular sequence reserved for the account of the female protagonist in the Book of Ruth. Although the artist/s certainly refrained from graphic presentations of any sexual material, the sequence itself is closely predicated on sexuality within the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, leading to Ruth's impregnation and subsequently the birth of Obed. He emerges as the grandfather of David, hence as the founder of the Biblical dynasty directly leading to the birth of Christ many generations later. Very similar as in the stained glass program of Sainte-Chapelle and elsewhere (including parallel contemporary Bibles), the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book focuses specifically on the female protagonist's fertility, which finds powerful expression in the symbolic use of corn and grain, especially fat sheaves of barley. Although the artists block our view of the naked bodies, the narrative implications either in the stained glass work or in the manuscript illuminations leave little doubt and strongly evoke our imagination in order to appeal to the viewer to trust the promise of fertility on the part of Ruth. The sexual tension between the couple proves to be most tangible, indicated by their intense gazes, gestures, symbolic clothing, and the development of the narrative scenes taking us from Ruth's meeting with Boaz to their wedding, married life, pregnancy, and parturition.

As Sand observes, the sexual content gains in directness and intensity through some deliberate deviations from the account in the Old Testament in small but significant details. There are also obvious motif borrowings from contemporary secular literature, such as the *Tristan* romances with King Mark, sitting in a tree, spying on the lovers in the garden, while the two lovers gaze at each other in great passion, but from a well-staged and safe distance. Moreover, the pictorial program is constantly enriched with strongly eroticized metaphors taking from the world of harvesting, all directly pointing toward Ruth's fertility and subsequent pregnancy. The persistent reference to grain in various forms specifically implies male seeds, and the artist/s spared no effort to allude to the sexual meaning as clearly as possible within the religious context—Sand can determine that even the use of an odd shoe symbolism serves to turn the attention to the male genital.

The wider implications of this art-historical investigation result in rather surprising and considerably illuminating perspectives regarding the social-political context. The illustrations in the Morgan Old Testament Picture Bible have to be seen in the literary context of *Tristan* and other contemporary romances and treatises on courtly love, but they also seem to be influenced by the genre of the *chansons de geste*, considering mutually shared narrative motifs, the appearance of

individual figures very similar to literary characters, structural elements, and symbolic objects and gestures. Sand suggests that the iconographic program powerfully conveyed ideals of femininity which subserviently, quietly, and yet also honorably offered itself for the continuity of the dynasty through bringing forth progeny. This was apparently of utmost importance for the French nobility at a time of the crusades when many participants died in the war or elsewhere and thereby threatened the family tradition back home.

Modeling Ruth after the typical courtly romance heroine, the artist/s borrowed a highly familiar type of damsel who inspires the male protagonist to profile himself to the best of his abilities as a knight and also secures the patrilinear tradition through marrying and then impregnating this consensual woman. Not surprisingly, as the author convincingly illustrates, the rich employment of agrarian imagery with its strong sexual allusions offered hope and security that the crusaders' families would not die out because back home fertile women, safe havens for their husbands before and after the war experience, produced new heirs

In Juan Ruiz's famous *Libro de buen amor* we are confronted, as Connie Scarborough alerts us, with dramatic examples of crude sexuality, but sexuality which is basically forced upon the male protagonist, the Archpriest. Nevertheless, he does not shrink back from it and actually enjoys it, insofar as he is, like all other human beings, frail and prone to transgress moral, ethical, and religious rules and laws. Perpetration, especially sexual, seems to be a common experience in human existence in all its myriad exchanges and contacts; hence any reader who is interested in grasping the meaning of life must also face the reality of sexuality as a dominant force, whether within the framework of marriage or outside. The *Libro de buen amor*, very similar to Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*, refuses to provide easy, if any, rational answers as to its own meaning, shock-full with internal contradictions, paradoxes, and contrasting viewpoints. This also applies to the treatment of love and sexuality, which, according to Scarborough, by their very nature, escape a logical, rational interpretation.

She focuses her attention on the four episodes in which the protagonist encounters wild women in the mountains, *serranas*, who allow him to pass or who help him find his way only if he pays them with sex (in two episodes) or submits to their rough and mean treatment. These episodes prove to be parodies of the traditional *pastourelle*, and they represent a form of *loco amor*, crazy love, certainly proffering entertainment, but also a negative foil for *buen amor*.

Grasping the literary text as a forum for discourse, we begin to understand the reasons for Ruiz's interest in these *serrana* figures. Wild, transgressive love and sexuality, demanded by these forest women from the male protagonist, uncover additional dimensions of human sexuality, which should not be covered over, and instead also need to be addressed by the learned person. In a way, as Scarborough

suggests, the male protagonist is raped by some of these women as the result of their wildness and the man's weakness. Possibly, Ruiz here alludes to a not so subliminal fear in men of overpowering and sexually threatening women, and provides, through the grotesque descriptions of these *serranas*, humorous release because of the absurdity of the set-up.<sup>307</sup>

But the Archpriest is not crushed by these wild women, though his experience with them, even when they have sex with him, seems rather frightening for all men among Ruiz's audience. Instead, the protagonist continues on his pilgrimage and ultimately reaches, as we may assume, the desired goal, which proves to be both religious and erotic at the same time, that is, *buen amor*.<sup>308</sup>

Literary evidence often proves to be most helpful in the exploration of the history of mentality, hence also of the history of sexuality, as many contributions to this volume demonstrate. Whereas medieval theologians and lawmakers regularly issued concrete statements regarding human behavior, particularly sexuality, poets commonly reflected desires, personal interests, opinions, as well as their lust, or concupiscence, and also deep-seated needs. Among the many genres of medieval love poetry, only the dawn-song, or *alba*—here disregarding the *pastourelle* because of its primarily dramatic character—reflects a truly private, intimate, love scene of a man and a woman, normally outside of regular legal bounds, whether in the form of adultery or in a pre-marital situation. But what do the poets really describe in these dawn songs? We are only told that the two lovers wake up at dawn, lament their imminent departure, and join in love-making one more time.

In her essay, Rasma Lazda-Cazers focuses on some dawn songs by the fifteenth-century South-Tyrolean poet Oswald von Wolkenstein (ca. 1376/1377-1445), who apparently took the additional step of going into considerably more detail regarding the sexual activities of the erotic couple at the final, most intimate moment. Lazda-Cavers's critical analysis of the metaphors and images employed by Oswald reveals a new dimension in the sexual discourse because the poet indirectly alludes to oral sex that he enjoyed with his beloved. The secret nature of the language used here finds a simple explanation in the public condemnation of all (!) forms of sexual activities that did not aim for procreation, relying on a traditional, narrowly prescribed bodily position in that process. Oswald, however, composed his songs mostly for his private entertainment and never deliberately reached out to a wider audience, which would not have understood most of the highly idiosyncratic allusions and linguistic expressions employed by the poet.

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<sup>307</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Albrecht Classen.

<sup>308</sup> See also the contributions to this volume by Eva Parra Membrives and Paula Leverage.



Lazda-Cavers convincingly demonstrates that Oswald reflects the strong concern of both partners in the (pre-marital?) love affair to preserve their honor, guarding the woman's virginity (with clear references to her hymen!), which required them to resort to the alternative of oral sex, as the poet's dawn songs reveals. The evidence presented convincingly supports the argument that here we have one of the very rare incidences in the history of medieval literature where a poet specifically discusses oral sex, most likely only fellatio because of the predominantly male perspective. The poetic examples presented by Lazda-Cavers confirm, once again, the importance of literary and linguistic analysis in support of a broadly-conceived approach to the history of mentality and culture. We are now challenged to extend our search wider for additional cases in medieval and early modern literature in which, perhaps much more often than heretofore assumed, the authors and poets revealed their private sexual passions, desires, and needs. We have known for a long time of common sexual symbolism within the literary discourse, such as the references to specific animals for human genitals, but Lazda-Cavers now also illustrates how much a careful reading of erotic poems and similar texts can uncover significant allusions to sexual perversions, depravity, and deviations, at least according to the norms of the Catholic Church, or, as in our case, to oral sex, probably a much more common form of sexual practice in medieval society than commonly assumed.

To what extent are we supposed to accept that the world of medieval courtly romances reflects harmonious gender relationships? Are we to take some of the plots as evidence that despite conflicts between men and women, ultimately peaceful and loving conditions dominate? How naive can we be to accept such viewpoints? Are not rather sexual violence, abuse, and deception much more prevalent than commonly assumed? How many times do courtly ladies have to suffer from rape, domestic violence, and crude mistreatment by the male protagonists before we finally recognize that some courtly poets did not intend to paint an idyllic image, but instead presented rather dramatic images of how destructive some gender relationships were? In fact, there are good reasons to explore how much the entire and complex concept of courtly love, courtliness, chivalry, tournaments, wooing, and the like served as convenient literary masks for male sexual coercion or violence against women. It might be an innovative realization, but we must not shy away from it, particularly in the wider context of the history of sexuality as a fundamental aspect of medieval and early-modern culture.

In her contribution, Jean E. Jost explores some of these issues by focusing on Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, the anonymous *Athelston* and *Sir Tristrem*. Although Criseyde ultimately escapes the psychological machinations of her uncle Pandarus and Troilus when she goes to Greece, she is subtly manipulated into emotional and physical capitulation, as Jost accurately observes, by two controlling men.

They lure her into a sexual union with Troilus using devious rhetorical devices and sophisticated control mechanisms through fear and psychological coercion. The emotional persuasion employed by both men, who operate in a close homosocial bond—one acting on behalf of the other, and both acting as surrogates in their common objectives of conquering Criseyde—proves overwhelming for the female protagonist who capitulates for a wide variety of reasons.

In other words, the poet reveals the extent to which the entire setting represents emotional and sexual coercion to which the audience might voice its loud opposition, since the female heroine can cling to her own desires only for so long. She lacks the fortitude and strength to resist these two men who inappropriately impose guilt and responsibility upon her with thinly veiled threats of abandonment or death from “luv-syknesse” while seemingly using only polite gestures and actions.

Nevertheless, as Jost also notes, Pandarus’s and Troilus’s interests ultimately do not merely lie with Criseyde; instead they pursue their own agenda of a power game for which sexuality serves as a convenient catalyst. Subjugating a vulnerable woman by means of sexual seduction is often the basic pattern seen in courtly romances, but Chaucer would not be the subtle poet he is had he not exposed her coercion in his most intriguing literary presentation insofar as Criseyde temporarily accepts the men’s authority and asks for “reed,” for instance.

Going one step further, the anonymous author of *Athelston* explicitly treats sexual violence and presents the horrid consequences for the female victims who become simple pawns for political purposes insofar as four brothers vie for the power in their kingdom. The women are quickly beaten, imprisoned, and threatened with the death penalty at the slightest suspicion of rebellion. Here violence and power dominate and are never subdued because the forces of love and, God forbid, mutual respect and tolerance among the members of the court do not cross gender lines.

By contrast, examining a representative of the *Tristan* tradition, *Sir Tristrem*, Jost illustrates that the opposite also could be the case, especially when true love inspires the protagonists to control their aggression or suppress their unchivalric behavior because of their dedication to their admired and beloved women. This might come as a surprise, considering the strong narrative similarities to *Troilus and Criseyde*, but sexual violence and love that also incorporates sexual joys seem to be the two sides of the same coin at least in the medieval world, if not even today.

Whereas Troilus, together with the wily Pandarus, mercilessly and highly manipulatively coerces Criseyde into a sexual union, never seeking her welfare or material protection, *Tristrem* allows Isonde freedom to choose to be his lover, developing a mutually profound love despite severe personal difficulties and external threats; their love is predicated on selfless altruism rather than selfish possession, even when *Tristrem* marries another woman for political reasons.

After all, he finally abandons that wife and returns to Isonde because he cannot live without her, despite King Mark's power and position as Isonde's husband. In that context sexuality, though only indirectly implied, gains a most positive value, whereas in Chaucer's text, those who claim it are manipulative and disresponsible. The dialectics are there, and the way that sexuality is realized by the protagonists and evaluated by the narrator, directly or indirectly in the text, indicates whether sex reflects love, or constitutes a means to exert violence.

As many contributors to this volume, and other scholars, have often commented on, sexuality plays a significant role in establishing a base for a person's identity in the Middle Ages, and a critical analysis of some of the medieval romances clearly sheds light on the problems and dialectic tensions that arise when that sexual identity proves to be fractured, unstable, or mixed. In Thomas Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth," which is contained in the *Works*, probably created quite freely without any known literary source, this issue finds most vivid expression, as Daniel Pigg illustrates in his contribution. Instead of relying on the traditional model of male sexual identity normally espoused in modern times, we ought to be much more careful in our evaluation of this issue in premodern times because it is intimately tied with religion, medical sciences, family, honor, and property rights.

In the late Middle Ages knighthood and chivalry experienced a deep sense of crisis, upon which writers, artists, and critics responded by reemphasizing traditional values and often exaggerating the social roles of the members of the knightly class. Pigg suggests that we revisit some of those issues as reflected in Malory's text by resorting to postmodern gender theory according to which sexual identity has to be perceived as an aspect of performance. This is the very problem that Sir Gareth experiences, and all of his endeavors are directed toward accomplishing the goal of performing successfully as a male in military terms (tournaments, for example), and with respect to serving his lady. Although Gareth faces criticism of his male identity, being ridiculed by Kay for his effeminate appearance (beautiful hands, hence his nickname "Beaumains"), he overcomes all doubts through his manly actions and can thereby confirm his masculine sexual identity.

As Pigg then recognizes, for Malory, and probably so for his audience, women's role in courtly society was of utmost importance in providing men with a sexual challenge and thereby inspiring them to identify fully with their masculinity as the central marker of their individuality within a social context. Moreover, Gareth's clandestine, perhaps sexual, relationship with Lyoness alerts us to public discourses about the changing attitudes regarding proper ways of getting married in full view of society and the Church. Although Gareth aims for the establishment of his male identity in traditional courtly terms, which implies sexual conquests of women, his clandestine meeting with Lyoness almost endangers his social

standing, which finds a remarkable parallel in Gawain's sexual temptations by the young lady at castle Haut Desert in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Receiving a most symbolic wound in his thigh by a knightly, though magical, opponent, Gareth is doubly marked by sexuality, both in terms of his lustful behavior toward his lady and by the lacerated thigh, a theme that had already been employed by the narrator in Marie de France's (ca. 1180–1190) *lai* "Guigemar." But this wound does not prod Gareth further in his sexual pursuit; instead it reminds him of his sinful behavior according to the contemporary theological and medical discourse. Insofar as the protagonist morally seems to have failed, yet is given the opportunity to marry Lyonesse, he has both won and lost in his quest for his masculine identity.

In the long wooing process, the narrative integrates numerous allusions to possible sexual activities, such as Gareth's wound, shedding blood, and the reopening of his wound in the thigh, though he is never together with his lady actually to experience sexual pleasures with her. This is all in the reader's mind, though definitely triggered by the narrator's evocative language. Nevertheless, three marriages round off all conflicts and tensions in this romance, which reconstitute honor to those who desire sexual experiences. But the surrogate, or symbolic, prior activities specifically address the issue of how the male protagonist can establish his identity and social reputation through the realization of sexual intimacy and also maintain honor—a conflict that also underlies most of the representative texts in the *Tristan* tradition. Clandestine, unchecked, and perhaps even violent sexuality threatens the knight's public esteem, though courtly society expected knights to affirm their identity through the very same approaches, serving ladies, if not gaining access to their bodies. Ultimately, however, marriage provides, as Malory strongly suggests, the safe haven where both sexuality and honor can be maintained according to the various intersecting public discourses dominating the late fifteenth century.

Can we find 'pornography' in the Middle Ages or the early modern age? Would people have been interested in transgressive sex, whatever that might have implied then? As unlikely as this scenario sounds at first sight, there are actually numerous late-medieval verse and prose narratives obviously predicated on dramatic perversion of heterosexual practices and the commodified utilization of sexuality.<sup>309</sup> As Albrecht Classen in his contribution to this volume suggests, a prurient interest in the body, particularly the genitals, comes to the fore in a number of rather unusual German *mæren* (verse narratives) in which genitals are

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<sup>309</sup> Numerous examples can actually be discovered in the collection of prose narratives by Michael Lindener, *Schwankbücher: Rastbüchlein und Katzzipori*, ed. Kyra Heidemann. Vol. I: *Texte. Arbeiten zur Mittleren Deutschen Literatur und Sprache*, 20.1 (Bern, Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 1991), both published in 1558.

amputated and then become anthropomorphized, thereby allowing the narrator to have them interact with representatives of the other gender.

The “Nonnenturnier” is only one of a variety of examples, but it proves to be rather shocking in its graphic nature, which might defy the fundamental theses developed by Norbert Elias and those, in strong contradistinction, by Hans Peter Duerr. After all, the extraordinary frankness with which the male body, or rather the genital, is addressed here, and this at a time when, according to Elias, traditional levels of shame culture were rising, defies the idea that late-medieval and early-modern society experienced a profound paradigm shift concerning the attitude toward the body in public. By contrast, Duerr had assumed that shame and prudishness are timeless phenomenon in all cultures, but this and other literary examples from the late Middle Ages seem to indicate rather the opposite, whether we think of Poggio Bracciolini’s (1380–1449) *Facetiae*, Giovanni Straparola’s (ca. 1480–1557) *Le piacevoli notti*, or Martin Montanus’s (ca. 1537–after 1566) *Gartengesellschaft*.<sup>310</sup>

But Classen also alerts the reader to earlier literary examples, such as *Mauritius von Craün* (ca. 1220/1230) where the traditional courtly value system begins to fail and courtly love comes to its end, as illustrated by the knight crudely imposing himself on his lady, forcing her to have sex with him, only to reject her afterwards because she had actually rejected him before due to his failure to stay awake while waiting for her. And in Heinrich Wittenwiler’s *Ring* (ca. 1401), which transports the audience into the world of peasants, almost pornographic descriptions mar the entire set-up of a miserably failing attempt to imitate the courtly world and rip apart the last vestiges of traditional moral and ethical ideals. In other words, late-medieval poets increasingly turned away from the refined scenery of courtly love and exposed everything, talking about genitals and discussing the coitus without any inhibition and in broad daylight. In the “Nonnenturnier,” however, even the sexual act itself is ridiculed and travestied by way of the voluntary castration in the name of erotic love.

At closer analysis, however, Classen suggests that the exposure of the human body, particularly its sexual organs in order to titillate the audience, is not the main purpose of the “Nonnenturnier” and similarly graphic narratives. Both the sexual and the perhaps even pornographic elements serve quite different functions. As the interpretation demonstrates, the authors reveal a profound interest in exploring questions concerning identity, virtues, rationality, epistemology, and gender relationships. Problems arise when basic social, moral, and ethical values are no longer, or rather not yet, part of the communal bonds.

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<sup>310</sup> Albrecht Classen, “Didactic Laughter through the Literary Discourse: Martin Montanus as Entertainer and Social Critic. Epistemological Reflections Upon Human Life Through Laughter,” to appear in: *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*; see also Werner Röcke, “Schwanksammlung,” 192.

Further, problems develop when a protagonist fails to establish a strong identity and does not know properly how to interact with the representatives of the other gender. All weaknesses in human life come to the fore when sexuality and love are at stake.

Not surprisingly, the “Nonnenturnier,” as well as a number of other medieval narratives, is also predicated on misogynist attitudes and paints women’s sexual instincts as irrepressible, uncontrollable, and threatening to men. Furthermore, this *mære* also offers strong satirical criticism of women’s convents, portraying the female inhabitants as hypocritical in their deceptive claim on observing chastity according to their vow. In other words, the almost shocking sexual material in this tale proves to be not an end in itself, hence not pornographic, but instead a catalyst to voice serious criticism against the Church, against individual failure to establish a harmonious love relationship, and against human vices, especially pride, hubris, and arrogance. But we cannot deny the dominant force of sexuality as such, which deserves, as the narrator of the “Nonnenturnier” indicates, its important place within the gender relationship outside of the world of the Church.

Marriage is not at issue here, yet sexuality as a positive and significant phenomenon certainly is. However, as we also learn from the other narratives, it proves to be rather difficult to handle sexuality which can easily create a topsy-turvy world where anarchy rules. Fantasy plays an important role, especially if it is so deeply eroticized as in the cases discussed here. As Wittenwiler’s *Ring* illustrates, already medieval literature instrumentalized sexuality for political and social ends insofar as the peasant world is described as suffering from irrepressible sexual desires that ultimately destroy all ethical and moral principles, leading to a bitter war in which the village, the focus of the narrative, is entirely decimated.

Consequently, as Classen argues, sexuality increasingly entered the public discourse at the end of the Middle Ages and became the springboard for numerous political and social issues in popular literature far into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In this regard, neither Elias’s nor Duerr’s theses really hold water today, and in light of the dominant theme of sexuality discussed increasingly openly in the early modern age we would have to rewrite some of these global hypotheses concerning the process of civilization.

As James A. Brundage, among others, has made abundantly clear, we can gain deep insight into the history of sexuality by looking at Church laws and secular laws that pertain to so-called sexual offenses.<sup>311</sup> Laws have always been issued because problems had to be dealt with, so rules and regulations addressing sexuality indicate certain conditions that have been observed by the authorities that then try to combat those, or regulate, and channel them. Sara McDougall

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<sup>311</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*.

focuses on the bishop's officiality court of the diocese of Troyes in the fifteenth century and examines the available records in light of this significant question our entire volume is investigating. Whereas Church officials had traditionally limited their attention to the moral behavior of clergy or nobles, the officiality court began to focus on all members of the laity by the late Middle Ages, trying to impose its moral code of behavior upon the ordinary people as well. In particular, the Church authorities systematically strategized to idealize marriage and extended their control mechanisms increasingly to the laity. In this sense the court records from Troyes allow excellent insights into the bishops' struggles to control the public even, if not particularly, in the area of marriage and sexuality. As McDougall rightly observes, sexuality, if practiced for the sake of progeny within marriage, was no longer regarded with abhorrence; instead marriage became a sacrament, especially because it helped people to cope with irrepressible sexual desires. Women, even if married and practicing sexuality in order to create children, could gain the status of sainthood. Men, on the other hand, were urged to marry to find appropriate release of their sexual needs.<sup>312</sup>

The increase in authority enjoyed by the officiality courts proves to be so significant because they were competing against other, secular, or papal, courts, and yet eventually succeeded in staking out their position and thus gained strong influence over people's private lives, that is, their sexuality, as best reflected by the court in Troyes. Curiously, however, as McDougall discerns, 'crimes' such as bestiality, masturbation, or sex at forbidden days (church holidays, fasting days, etc.) virtually do not appear in the records. Moreover, no clear and systematic taxonomy of crimes and subsequent penalties emerges, perhaps as a result of continued competition with other courts, but certainly because judges exercised their rights to punish offenders arbitrarily, taking into consideration the circumstances of both the individual and his or her offence.

Most interestingly, prostitutes and their trade were not regarded as criminal at all, and they even appear in a number of cases as witnesses concerning individuals charged with having committed adultery. Only in one of the thousands of cases studied by McDougall is a prostitute forced to leave the brothel, but not because of the sinfulness of the institution itself, but rather because she was engaged. Whereas in other places adultery was prosecuted by secular courts, in Troyes the officiality courts claimed authority in this regard as well. The records also indicate that surprisingly few nuns were accused of having broken their vow of chastity.

Statistically speaking, McDougall concludes that more members of the clergy were prosecuted than members of the laity, but the difference in numbers is not particularly remarkable. Many times the courts only admonished those tried for adultery, or concubinage, to stay away from each other, without fully enforcing

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<sup>312</sup> David d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage*; Albrecht Classen, *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs*.

their separation in practical terms. Repeat offenses are very common, but so was the observable reduction or remission of fines, as if the officiality courts realized only too well their limited power to restrict people's need for sexual release, both within and outside of the confines of marriage. In other words, the court records indicate, as McDougall concludes, that the Church increasingly recognized sexuality as a normal aspect in people's lives, but tried hard to regulate it and to contain it within the standard legal limits. We might wonder, considering the huge volume of relevant case records, how successful the officiality courts really were. Possibly, as McDougall suggests, the private life of the laity was increasingly scrutinized and supervised, making sexuality in its myriad of manifestations into a topic of intense public debate.<sup>313</sup> Or, as we also might assume, the large number of legal documents signals how little sexual interests and desires could really be suppressed, as the continued existence of brothels and prostitutes, for instance, that were not even the objects of the investigations by the officiality courts, vividly demonstrates.<sup>314</sup>

A volume dealing with the history of sexuality would be incomplete if it ignored one of the most important topic in this regard, prostitution, hence also the world of brothels, pimps, and go-betweens. Gertrud Blaschitz examines this important theme by studying a variety of late-medieval German verse romances and lyric poetry, along with some significant manuscript illustrations. In fact, in the late Middle Ages the interest in the topic of sex trade gained considerably in weight for various poets and artists, such as Heinrich der Teichner, Heinrich von Neustadt, Heinrich Steinhöwel, and Oswald von Wolkenstein. Blaschitz focuses primarily on the various German versions of the ancient Greek/Latin *Apollonius of Tyre*, adapted and translated throughout the ages, and finally appealing also to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German audiences.

As Blaschitz can demonstrate, the literary texts and the visual documents richly reflect the important function of commercial prostitution in late-medieval urban life. Although Heinrich von Neustadt, for instance, drew from a long literary tradition when he developed the theme of prostitution and discussed the institution of a brothel, which actually harked as far back as the first century C.E. (see the surviving remnants of a brothel, or *lupanare*, in Pompeii), both he and contemporary poets adapted the ancient material to reflect the conditions

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<sup>313</sup> This finds rich confirmation in the plethora of relevant secular narratives commonly predicated on sexual themes; see the contributions to this volume by Albrecht Classen and Kathleen Llewellyn. See also Wolfgang Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität*.

<sup>314</sup> See now also the parallel case study focusing on another area in the late Middle Ages, by Prisca Lehmann, *La Repression des délits sexuels dans les Etas savoyards: Chatellenies des diocèses d'Aoste, Sion et Trutin fin XIIIe-XVe siècle* (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 2006).



of their own time, confirming thereby the prevalence of prostitution and brothels as significant components of the cultural-economic and social situations in the late Middle Ages. Artists such as the so-called *Hausbuch-Meister* provided detailed illustrations of brothels, both within the city and in the countryside, and confirmed how well informed they were about prostitutes and their business partners. After all, numerous historical documents contain references to the significant political roles of prostitutes within the diplomatic sphere, even for representational purposes, especially when a dignitary visited a city, or when a major church council took place, such as the Council of Constance (1414-1418).

With the help of literary analysis Blaschitz succeeds in isolating the various aspects of a brothel as it probably actually existed in real institutions during the late Middle Ages, including the prostitutes, the owner of the brothel, the servants, and the cost for a prostitute. Moreover, through her reading of individual novels and poems Blaschitz discovers evidence confirming the competition among the urban and the rural brothels, the function of old female go-betweens, and the not insignificant role of illegal prostitutes in private accommodations, in bath-houses, in inns, and in some cases even on the road. Whereas historical research has discussed prostitution already for quite some time, Blaschitz's literary-historical analysis offers additional elements reflecting the general mentality of the time concerning the social status and financial, economic, and political conditions of prostitutes.

Widowhood represented, as recent scholarship has amply illustrated, a remarkable new stage in the life of a woman in the Middle Ages and the early modern age, granting her, if the circumstances were right, almost the status of a male, given that she did not remarry and did not become the object of gossip about possible sexual transgressions. According to prescriptive literature in many areas outside Spain, younger widows were mostly supposed to find another husband. Whether we turn to Germany, England, France, or the Iberian Peninsula, theological and didactic writers throughout the late Middle Ages and the early modern age basically agreed that older widows were expected to withdraw from active public life. Nevertheless, reality was often quite different, and the more moralists waged a war against sexual depravity and transgression, the more sexual libertinage seems to have bloomed, though it is not easy to unearth the evidence from historical documents, unless we want to trust a rich body of literary texts reflecting upon widows' concupiscence and lewdness.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> See, for instance, Heather M. Arden, "Grief, Widowhood, and Women's Sexuality in Medieval French Literature," *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval*

Stephanie Fink De Backer presents one such case in which a widow and her confessor formed, though only secretly, a life-long passionate relationship and a pregnancy even occurred. She examines the life of María de Silva and her confessor, Diego de Castilla, both of high social rank. Their intimate relationship began after the death of María's husband in 1537 and after she had been ordered by the queen to retire to the Cistercian convent of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, where she lived until her death in 1575 without ever accepting any marriage proposal. Diego and María had previously met during their service at court in the queen's retinue between 1526 and 1528 and obviously had fallen in love, when their lives went entirely different routes (marriage vs. clerical career). But a son, named Luis de Castilla, was apparently born in 1540, though the evidence regarding his origin is only of circumstantial nature. Nevertheless, Fink De Backer's careful analysis demonstrates that Luis, though he admitted his illegitimacy throughout his life and only revealed his father's identity after the death of both parents, experienced only limited social discrimination. On the contrary, even within Orthodox Spanish society, among the ranks of the elite most frequently addressed by prescriptive literature, illegitimacy was apparently an issue that could be overcome, and there are plenty of indications that numerous children were even born and raised in convents. Particularly because widows were realistically subject to sexual temptations and succumbed to them quite often, as was the case with María, we can begin to understand the vehemence of the misogyny in the contemporary moralistic treatises staging almost a vendetta against lustful widows.

Intriguingly, all the evidence unearthed by Fink De Backer points to a fascinating new development in the lives of these three people. While the parents worked hard to keep their familial relationship with their illegitimate child a secret, they made sure over the next decades to provide Luis with a solid education and subsequently with secure positions and income, thereby guaranteeing his high-ranking social standing. Although secrecy shrouded these multifarious efforts, the parents succeeded in maintaining a sound family life in Toledo and in supporting their offspring in every respect, despite the opprobrium associated with sexuality outside of the bonds of marriage, steadily growing in the Spanish discourse of that time.

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*Europe*, ed. Louise Mirrer. Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Civilization (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 305–19. See also Doreen Fischer, *Witwe als weiblicher Lebensentwurf in deutschen Texten des 13. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe I: Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, 1820 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2002), 232–46, et passim. Now see also Britta-Juliane Kruse, *Witwen: Kulturgeschichte eines Standes in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007); see my review, forthcoming in *Mediaevistik*.

After María's death in 1575, Diego and Luis collaborated to create a fabulous burial chapel for which even El Greco was hired to design and paint the first of his now famous retablos. This altarpiece became, at least indirectly, a visual document of a passionate love affair that led to the birth of a bastard, against the rabid warnings repeatedly voiced by contemporary theological and didactic writers. The images underscore the family's ardent attempt to seek God's mercy and acceptance of Diego's secret union with this high-ranking widow, which had led to the birth of Luis, hoping thereby to gain eternal salvation for them all. Not surprisingly, the chapel in Santo Domingo el Antiguo ultimately served as the burial ground for the entire family, but it also contains, from our perspective, an intriguing history of sexual relationships that might have been more or less common, yet had to be kept secret from public knowledge in order to protect the social standing of both parents and their son.

Sexuality and begetting progeny have often been used as metaphors of the creative act involving poets and artists alike who desire to bequeath to posterity something from their own spirit for the preservation of their memory. Resorting to sexual imagery actually proved to be a powerful strategy in the history of late-medieval and early modern French literature. Reinier Leushuis examines the employment of corresponding allegorical expressions in the works of Jean de Meun (*Roman de la rose*), Jean Lemaire de Belges (*La Concorde des deux langages*), and François Rabelais (*Prologue* to the *Tiers Livre*). In fact, the concept of fertility as applied to the writing process was richly employed particularly by Renaissance Humanists for whom literary fertility proved to be a productive metaphor for their own purposes.<sup>316</sup>

The texts by the three authors commonly resort to the image of the poet as a linguistic reproducer in times of both real and metaphorical warfare, playing both on the literal, i.e. sexual, meaning and on the allegorical function. Not surprisingly, the impact of Jean's *Rose* was deeply felt even in the early sixteenth century, when it was identified as the original source for early-modern French literature—quite parallel to the global veneration that Chaucer enjoyed in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English literature, both characterized as fertile generators (or father figures), and this at a time when due to external military threats and social instability the sense of national and cultural identity seemed to be at stake because of hostile outside forces.

By the same token, Rabelais, among others, projected the image of the author as begetter of language, deliberately drawing from common sexual imagery, but transferring it to the creative act of producing literature. But Jean de Meun

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<sup>316</sup> For remarkable similarities in the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book (ca. 1250), see the contribution to this volume by Alexa Sand.

seems to have been the first to catapult himself explicitly into the narrative to support his passive protagonist-narrator and thus to serve, next to, or identical with, his Genius character, as linguistic and poetic generator within the context of allegorical warfare aiming to conquer the rose. Leushuis observes this phenomenon both in a number of scenes describing the battle between the allegorical forces and at the midpoint of the romance where Jean stages himself taking over from Guillaume de Lorris, author of the first part of the *Romance of the rose*, and asserting his regenerative power with regards to language and the literary discourse.

In Jean Lemaire de Belges's *La Concorde des deux langages* (1511) a similar combination of linguistic and poetic fertilization processes comes to the fore within a military context, constituting the author as the creator of culture. Again, Genius appears on the stage and claims its creative power, in direct borrowing from Jean's *Rose*. In fact, he appeals to the audience to procreate and to develop the French language further for their cultural identity, and this both against the backdrop of King Louis XII's energetic Gallican politics opposing hostile pressures from Italy, and against the imminent danger by the Turks who had threatened all of Europe since the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and continued to do so for the next few centuries. For Genius in Jean Lemaire de Belges's *Concorde*, this also meant to appeal to the French youth to procreate as much as possible so as to strengthen the French nation.

As Leushuis illustrates, this tradition continued with Rabelais's *Prologue* to the *Tiers Livre* (1546) both in the concrete and the allegorical sense of encouragement to procreate, here closely coupled with the traditional rhetorical strategy of linguistic *copia*. For Rabelais, the literary creative act, predicated on the Biblical *procreate and multiply*, served as a substitute whereby his "I" figure, who is in no position to partake in the military endeavors described in the *Prologue*, defines itself as a fertile linguistic progenitor, similar to Jean de Meun's and Jean Lemaire de Belges's approach, and in this role finds himself empowered to contribute to the war efforts after all, but now on his own terms.

This observation finds intriguing confirmation in the use of the Genius figure in the two older texts and of the Diogenes character in Rabelais's *Prologue* to the *Tiers Livre*, both figures etymologically reflecting a sense of begetting or begotten, attributing the function of empire building to the protagonist-narrator, utilizing sexual procreation for linguistic, literary, but then also political, and belligerent purposes, all of them perceiving themselves in the role of progenitors, if not begetters, of the French language, culture, and identity, and thus proposing a 'replenishment' of the French vernacular that forms an alternative to the sole imitation of classical models as put forth in Joachim Du Bellay's famous *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* (1549). As Leushuis's analysis brings to light, sexuality proves to be one of the central icons of

medieval and early modern culture and literature, powerfully serving as a crucial reference point for the creative act both concretely and metaphorically.

In other words, exploring the meaning of sexuality in the Middle Ages and the early modern age allows us to cast aside the traditional shroud of nineteenth-century purist and Victorian morality and to return to a much clearer understanding of the central discourse concerning the individual's critical function within society, which always seems to be intimately associated with sexuality as one of the central forces in human life, and this both physically and spiritually.

In early-modern French literature, the experience of sex was increasingly associated with death, as Kathleen M. Llewellyn argues, insofar as sexual encounters tended to lead to catastrophes, including killing, or natural death. Although the power structures of patriarchal society in the past seem to have solidly advantaged men, in terms of sex the opposite at times could be the case.<sup>317</sup> Numerous literary examples indicate that too much sex in a marital relationship could exhaust the husband who might subsequently die. Particularly widows appeared as threatening and overwhelming for their new husbands because they would never exhaust their sexual desires. Older, insatiable widows seemed to be particularly dangerous in this regard, which would also add additional weight to the explanation of the early-modern witch craze as a reflection of men's extensive fear of female sexuality.<sup>318</sup>

Llewellyn also points out that fear of nymphomaniac women extended to all women of every age group, whether married or not. Connie Scarborough had observed a similar phenomenon in her contribution to this volume, discussing the *serranas*, wild and ferocious mountain women who regularly demand sex from the helpless wanderer, the Archpriest, in Juan Ruiz's *Libro de buen amor*.

But Llewellyn is more interested in the correlation between sex and death insofar as her French sources indicate the extent to which women could also be the fatal victims of sexual experiences, whether they are raped and then killed in their feeble attempt to protect their virtuosity, or whether they are executed by their husbands when caught *in flagrante*, committing adultery. However, the opposite experience, that is, the lack of sex, can also lead to a woman's death, depending on the context, which underscores, once again, the key argument concerning the rather intimate relationship between sex and death within the literary discourse at least since the sixteenth century. Llewellyn heavily relies

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<sup>317</sup> Rüdiger Schnell, "Macht im Dunkeln: Welchen Einfluß hatten Ehefrauen auf ihre Männer? Geschlechterkonstrukte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit," *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*, ed. id. (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004), 309–29, offers numerous examples to confirm this observation.

<sup>318</sup> Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze*, 127–59.

on Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*, but she also adduces numerous other examples confirming her observations. Perhaps not surprisingly, many Biblical narratives of Judith, which are predicated on the woman killing her potential lover for political and military reasons, lend further support in this regard. The more Holofernes, portrayed as brutal, beastly, and inconsiderate, is blinded by love, the more he makes it possible for Judith to execute him.

To some extent, as these examples illustrate, death could also bring about immortality, as in the case of Judith, but, more important, in the love poetry by Ronsard who created a whole cult of venerating and worshiping the deceased lover, or by Louise Labé. However, this would not necessarily be a specific Renaissance theme, as it can already be found, for example, in various late-medieval narratives and poems. At any rate, as Llewellyn emphasizes, early-modern French poetry tended, more than ever before, to eroticize death, as reflected, again, by Ronsard's works, which might well foreshadow some late nineteenth- and twentieth-century love poetry.

Altogether, as the author concludes, early-modern French literature offers numerous examples of sexuality being intimately associated with death, whether violent or peaceful, whether evoking approval or longing, pain or rejoicing over the death of an enemy. Sex and the erotic, then, prove to be, in this context, most powerful catalysts for fundamental human experiences.

Whereas female sexuality was regularly regarded with considerable suspicion and fear by medieval writers who claimed that women's hot nature would make them insatiable in terms of sex, the medical-scientific discourse in the early modern world turned away from this perspective by shifting the focus from female sexual pleasure (clitoris) to the breast as the arch symbol of the female function as a nursing mother. Whereas medieval literature commonly discussed women's active participation in sexual relationships and underscored their central role in this regard, although from a highly critical perspective and heavily relying on sarcasm and satire, early-modern literature increasingly disregarded this aspect and reinvented woman as mother securely contained in the home of her husband.

Pursuing this phenomenon, Allison P. Coudert concludes our volume with a true tour-de-force in examining how the discourse about women changed fundamentally during the so-called 'long eighteenth century' (1600-1800), catapulting women onto an esoteric pedestal of self-sufficient, home-bound motherhood without any interests in intellectual, political, or artistic activities, thereby essentially excluding female sexuality altogether, or rather, as Coudert emphasizes, channeling it into motherhood as the crucible for the well-being and survival of the nation. Not surprisingly, this new discourse focused on middle- and upper-class women, and mostly ignored the masses of women on

the lower level who would not have fit the general model conceived of by the theorists, writers, artists, and scientists.

Whereas until the late seventeenth century the Aristotelian one-sex model dominated, which was predicated on the notion of both man and woman experiencing sexual orgasm in order to conceive, by the eighteenth century this was replaced by a two-sex model according to which only the man needed to have this orgasm to impregnate the woman. This also implied, as Coudert notes, that women were increasingly regarded as mere receptacles of male semen and in this respect almost resembled animals. Consequently, many medical authors began to insist on having absolute authority over women even in the area of pregnancy and delivery of babies. Whereas male medical doctors and surgeons had replaced female doctors and practitioners in the late Middle Ages, by the eighteenth century male midwives followed the same pattern, excluding women from this domain.

Perhaps not so surprisingly, at the same time topics such as homosexuality and hermaphroditism created enormous anxiety and threatened the fragile balance of sexual identities within the patriarchal system. That fear was strongly balanced by the public focus on the female breast as the essential icon of motherhood, the most distinct marker of the female role in eighteenth-century society limited to delivering and nursing babies. In line with a growing concern about the defense of the nation in terms of a strong and healthy growth of the population and hence of the ability to maintain an army, mothers' function was publicly hailed as sustaining the well-being of the entire people.

Concomitantly, as Coudert discovers, European civilization was deliberately contrasted with the stagnant development in other parts of the world, especially Africa, where women were supposed to possess excessive genital organs, an expression of their irrepressible sexual desire, in contrast to European women's alleged chastity and self-control. The pervasive fear of women's interest in sexuality also led to stern warnings against masturbation, which was regarded as a serious threat to women's health and as a danger to blur the traditional lines of differentiation between the sexes.

Moreover, the public discourse on sexual practices increasingly turned to issues concerning national identity, the economic and political conflict among the social classes, the alleged dominance of Western civilization, and, above all, the utmost need to limit women—at least in the middle and upper class—entirely to their motherhood function. However, precisely this limitation of women's role in society to reproduction also implied for many writers and scholars the uncanny correlation of women to primates, hence to the world of mere physicality. Nevertheless, in order to cast a veil upon this mean-spirited approach to women, the male participants in the public discourse on sexuality also embraced the Cult of Womanhood, which idealized chaste, humble, obedient women who willingly subordinated themselves to patriarchal

authority. Little wonder then that the nineteenth century saw the rise of feminism because the male public had pulled all registers—medical, theological, anthropological, literary, economic, and political—to ensure women's sexual deference and complete acceptance of their maternal function—and this mostly in the middle and upper classes, whereas women in the lower classes were equated with the dangerous savages, if not animals.

Although the witch craze was mostly over by the eighteenth century, which was, admittedly, a great advance for women at large, the new Cult of Womanhood pursued, perhaps not so surprisingly, as Coudert suggests, rather similar strategies to exclude women, still regarded as a sexual threat, from public power and influence. Interestingly, the medieval discourse predicated on the notion of women's inexhaustible sexual desire found its continuation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when female sexuality was equated with animal behavior and accepted only within the framework of motherhood.

Insofar as Coudert's contribution concludes this volume, we can also add that her study powerfully illustrates, once again, the fundamental need to explore sexuality as one of the most significant elements determining cultural conditions, norms, and values. Studying sexual behavior, concepts, and values sheds important light on much larger issues determining culture and society on a broad level. The discourse on sexuality reflects fundamental gender relationships, deep-seated fear and also desires, physical needs and pleasures, and then again social structures, economic conditions, religious viewpoints, and even military strategies (e.g., whether women should be allowed to participate in crusades and other military operations).

One can approach sexuality from a biological, medical, and psychological perspective, and the critical analysis of this topic also allows us to comprehend those elements that determine all human interaction. In this sense we can safely claim that this volume addresses one of the most fundamental concerns in cultural history, revealing how multi-faceted sexuality actually proves to be, shedding significant light on virtually every aspect of society.

Most of the contributions to this volume were originally presented at the Fifth International Symposium on Medieval and Early Modern Studies held at the University of Arizona, Tucson, May 3-6, 2007.<sup>319</sup> Unfortunately, not every presenter was able to contribute to the present publication, but then several outside scholars volunteered their articles. I am particularly missing the

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<sup>319</sup> [http://www.gened.arizona.edu/aclassen/sexuality\\_conference.htm](http://www.gened.arizona.edu/aclassen/sexuality_conference.htm). For the program, see <http://www.gened.arizona.edu/aclassen/program3.htm> (both last accessed on March 31, 2008).



fascinating paper by Diane Wolfthal (Arizona State University, Tempe), "Illicit Sexuality, Gendered Spatial Topography, and the Early Modern Bathhouse," which would have nicely complemented the paper by Gertrud Blaschitz. But she has a book forthcoming where much of that material will be dealt with: *In and Out of the Marital Bed: Seeing Sex in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art* (Yale University Press).<sup>320</sup>

Each piece in this volume has been thoroughly and repeatedly reviewed first by myself several times, and it was then presented to the entire group of scholars under the umbrella of this symposium. Although there was no process of blind submissions, I dare say that the ultimate quality of each article demonstrates that the peer reviewing procedure was most rigorous and constructive. My gratitude goes to all contributors for their extraordinary cooperation and willingness to accept suggestions, comments, and criticism, and for their great effort to provide me with their work in a timely fashion. The heat of the extensive and critical review involving everyone on a mutual level might have been at times quite intensive, but the resulting "steel" of scholarly work will ultimately be the desired reward for all our efforts.

The final outcome, the present volume, will hopefully add to the quality of our series, "Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture." I see our efforts as a broad and interdisciplinary contribution to an ever ongoing scholarly discourse, complementing older and more recent studies on this topic, such as April Harper's and Caroline Proctor's collection of historical, theological, medical-historical, and moral-ethical articles on sexuality.<sup>321</sup> Remaining mistakes are all my own; the camera-ready manuscript for publication is the result of my work, and I could not blame any research assistant or office staff since I had none available for this project, as has been in the case of all my previous publications, alas a rather typical situation at an American university.

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<sup>320</sup> She was kind enough to let me know the table of contents: Chapter I: In and Out of the Marital Bed; Chapter II: The Dressing Area; Chapter III: The Woman in the Window; Chapter IV: The Bathhouse; Chapter V: Outdoors on the Hunt; Conclusions.

<sup>321</sup> *Medieval Sexuality: A Casebook*, ed. April Harper and Caroline Proctor. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2008). This volume appeared before the contributors to our volume could take any of the conclusions presented there into consideration. I would like to thank Daniel Pigg for alerting me to this new publication. The articles are grouped under the following headings, considerably different from the general approach taken by the contributors to the present volume: 1. Early Medieval Histories; 2. Sainly Sexualities; 3. Consuming Passions; 4. Real and Imaginary Kingdoms (dealing with moral issues, hence also with sexual transgressions); and 5: To the East (projection of sexual abnormality onto the Eastern or Muslim world).

It is my pleasure to acknowledge and gratefully recognize considerable financial support for the realization of our symposium, coming from the Vice President for Research, Graduate Studies, and Economic Development (The University of Arizona, or UA), the Dean of Humanities (also UA), UAMARRC (University of Arizona Medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation Committee), ACMRS (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Tempe, AZ), the University of Arizona Library, Special Collections, and the Departments of German Studies, Spanish and Portuguese, Classics, English, Russian and Slavic, Psychology, and Anthropology (all UA).

I would also like to express my thanks to my dear colleague, Marilyn Sandidge, Westfield State College, MA, supporting me in many ways as the co-editor of our series, *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, and to our most enthusiastic and generous editor-in-chief at de Gruyter, Berlin, Dr. Heiko Hartmann. My greatest gratitude goes, of course, to all the contributors to this volume. Their patience and willingness to listen to comments, to consider suggestions, and to respond to seemingly endless questions, hence to revise their pieces so many times was unparalleled. We have formed, by happy default, an enormously energetic research group bonded together by the same scholarly interests and the readiness to collaborate with colleagues in neighboring disciplines. It gives me profound joy to know that true scholarship can establish a network of colleagues and friends that spans the entire world.

Sexuality is an essential, a beautiful component in human life when embraced by love and commitment, mutual respect and tolerance. In light of this general, timeless observation, there does not seem to be any further need to justify the scholarly interest in this most complex phenomenon which has regularly led to happiness and sorrow, and has deeply determined all cultural and intellectual developments. To study sexuality in the Middle Ages and the early modern age profoundly adds to our understanding of that pre-modern world and opens most important perspectives for us as well in grasping its discursive nature, its profound embedding into the social fabric, and its signification for the theological, medical, social, military, political, literary, and artistic world.



Albrecht Classen  
(University of Arizona, Tucson)

## Naked Men in Medieval German Literature and Art Anthropological, Cultural-Historical, and Mental-Historical Investigations<sup>1</sup>

At issue in this paper, which picks up a specific thread in the Introduction, is the question what constitutes civilization, culture, progress, and how the experience of the human body in its nudity fits into this discourse, which carries, of course, strong allusions to sexuality, though not all the time. I choose this topic because it strongly profiles many of the issues and aspects that will be discussed in this volume insofar as the naked body carries enormous cultural-historical meanings and can serve many different functions. Cultural historians such as Norbert Elias and Hans Peter Duerr, above all, have struggled hard over the last decades to gain insight into one of the most intriguing questions concerning the historical development from the Middle Ages to the modern world, focusing, above all, on the experience of shame associated with the exhibition of the naked body within society, but the issue has never been fully laid to rest and might not even be completely manageable because the premises in this heated debate could have been wrong or misdirected.

For both scholars the most burning concern addresses such issues as: Can we easily and clearly demarcate past cultures, from which we certainly evolved, from our own, and if so, how? Would we still be justified in talking about 'dark ages,' if we even knew what that term might fully denote, apart from some generic, rather irrelevant aspects, such as oral versus literate, rural versus urban, heroic versus courtly? As Elizabeth A. R. Brown now emphasizes, "The division between 'the Middle Ages' and 'the Renaissance', like the names assigned to the two time-spans, has had unfortunate results. For those like [Lord] Acton, who study the

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Marilyn Sandidge, Westfield State College, MA, for her critical reading of this paper. An early version was presented at the *Sixty-First Annual Convention of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, Calgary, Alberta, October 2007

later centuries, all that precedes 1500 is on the wane, in decline, and degenerate, whereas what follows is new, fresh, and full of promise, distinct and different from what came before . . . .”<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, progress happened, whatever we might mean by that term, and medieval culture changed, whether we think of clothing, building, the political system, weaponry, artistic styles, scientific approaches, and so forth.

But did people really change? Did their approaches to matters of love, sexuality, fear, anger, sickness, death, time, and the foreign differ remarkably from earlier or later ones? A first and forceful answer would be: absolutely, otherwise we would not be what we are today. And yet traditions continued, fundamental ideas and values resurfaced or never went away completely, religious needs stayed the same, despite numerous changes in the format of how people worshipped and what texts they used to learn about God—all this the basic stuff relevant for the history of mentality, which is also deeply informed by attitudes about sexuality and nakedness.<sup>3</sup>

One of the criteria used to determine the transition from one stage in the cultural process to the next has been the historically changing approaches to the human body and the feeling about nakedness. As Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin rightly emphasize, “The body both produces knowledge and is shaped by it, both is determined by it and colludes with it . . . . The body is after all *the* tool of desire, the *tool* of desire. The self is ultimately an imaginary construction within the world, invested in the body that a person becomes after the primary link to the mother has been lost.”<sup>4</sup> Norbert Elias had once proposed that the medieval world cared surprisingly little about exposing one’s body to others, and only in the course of time did a new shame culture set in. For him, the process of civilization was determined by an ever growing interaction of people and society, creating ever more intensive interdependence, which had far-reaching consequences for the experience of nakedness, hence of shame. In other words, rationality increasingly replaced instinct-driven behavior, leading to fully-fledged forms of shame, which Elias defines as a type of fear of the superior other. Nakedness hence became a dreaded condition that everyone tried to avoid, and this more and more since the sixteenth century. But there are also, as he emphasizes, noteworthy differences in

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “On 1500,” *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 691–710; here 693.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, “Zu Theorie und Praxis der Mentalitätsgeschichte,” *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. id. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 469 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993), XV–XXXVII; see also his ruminations on the same topic in “Wie ‘fremd’ ist uns das Mittelalter?” id., *Das fremde Mittelalter: Gottesurteil und Tierprozess* (Essen: Magnus Verlag, 2006), 11–21.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, “Introduction,” *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. eadem (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 6.

the perception of the naked body by members of the aristocracy versus members of the burgher class who relied much more heavily on mutual control and discipline by way of injecting a sense of shame.<sup>5</sup>

One key feature of the civilizing transformation from the Middle Ages to the modern age proves to be, according to Elias, the growing control mechanisms concerning all human affects and instincts, ultimately being dominated by a super-ego (430). We might even summarize Elias's observations with a reference to the emerging bourgeois world where shame exerted one of its greatest impacts on the individual, subjugating it under broad social norms of behavior, performance, and social and moral norms and rules. Fear and shame are the result of social processes, and they grow in intensity the more society experiences an ever closer cohabitation in a limited space (448).

As to nakedness, Elias underscores that in the Middle Ages people did not have the same attitude or sensitivity regarding nakedness as today because it was common to sleep together in one bed, in one room, to sleep naked (unless in a monastery where the opposite practice was pursued), to take baths together, not separating the genders, and those who covered themselves up seemed to have to hide something, being ashamed of a bodily shortcoming or illness. Only by the sixteenth, and much more noticeably since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, did this innocence concerning the nude body disappear and make room for shame. For Elias, this open attitude toward the naked body was a sign of a certain infantility, actually characteristic of the entire period of the Middle Ages, which finds its parallel in Johan Huizinga's seminal observations about late-medieval Burgundian and Flemish culture insofar as children never display any self-consciousness and care little, or not at all, about being naked.<sup>6</sup>

Night clothing was not invented and generally introduced until the same time when the fork and the handkerchief—both specific markers of the radical transformation in the long-term civilization process—became standard features of early modern society.<sup>7</sup> For the sociologist Elias, this indicates that people at least

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<sup>5</sup> Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. Vol. 2: *Wandlungen der Gesellschaft: Entwurf zu einer Theorie der Zivilisation* (1939; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), 429. For an English transl., see Edmund Jephcott, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization* (1978; Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> J(han) Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages: A Study of the Forms of Life, Thought and Art in France and the Netherlands in the XIVth and XVth Centuries* (1919; Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), 9: "To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us."

<sup>7</sup> Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. Vol. 1: *Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes* (1939; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), 222–27.

until the late Middle Ages harbored much fewer inhibitions regarding their bodies and embraced nakedness as a normal thing in human interactions.

Elias's thesis has productively challenged modern sociology, anthropology, ethnology, and cultural history at large, offering new perspectives regarding changing attitudes toward the body, but he has also met sharp criticism, especially by Hans Peter Duerr who has claimed in a series of books that sentiments such as shame are timeless and transcultural features of human life, and that the whole notion of a civilization process, which somehow implies 'progress,' amounts to a myth. He cites a number of cases from medieval German and French literature, and also refers to various images from that time to support his counter-argument that medieval people were fully aware of the shamefulness of the naked body and specifically refrained from exposing themselves in public. Only prostitutes did not demonstrate any inhibition to show themselves entirely naked to other people, especially men.<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, Duerr argued that medieval people had a clear sense of voyeurism as a form of dramatic transgression and regarded the situation in which a woman or a man was secretly observed from the outside as shameful. Many of the scenes in medieval art work depicting naked men and women together in a bathhouse would have to be interpreted as images from brothels, hence would not have any bearing on the idea of shame, changes in civilization, and in the attitude toward the naked body as interpreted by Elias.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Peter Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988); see also the second volume, *Intimität*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990); subsequently Duerr dealt with related topics: *Obszönität und Gewalt*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 3 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1993); *Der erotische Leib*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 4 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1997); *Die Tatsachen des Lebens*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 5 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002). Some of these volumes have already been translated into various languages (vol. 1, Italian 1991; Swedish 1994; French 1998; Japanese 1990; Turkish 1990; Portuguese 2002; vol. 3, Swedish, 1998; but so far not into English).

<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly, Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 38–58, has assembled an impressive array of sources and documents that would confirm his arguments at first sight. But a more careful analysis will force us to discriminate much further, questioning both Elias's and Duerr's basic theses with respect to their relevance for our understanding of the civilization process. Most problematic proves to be, as scholarship has clearly demonstrated, Duerr's free-floating collection of evidence regarding the shame culture from all over the world and from all time periods, as if cultural phenomena among some Polynesian peoples today could be simply equated with those prevalent in the European Middle Ages. For further criticism, see Michael Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess: Mythos oder Realität: Wissenschaftssoziologische Untersuchungen zur Elias-Duerr-Kontroverse*. Figurationen, 4 (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2002), 81–90. The dilemma of the entire debate consists in the clash between the large theoretical concepts that mostly disregard empirical data, and factual purism that limits itself to concretely observable aspects in human life. The latter faces the danger of blinding itself to larger, more complex issues, whereas the former disregards contradictory elements and exposes itself to criticism of the most basic kind (Hinz 88–89).

Scholarship has explored these two theoretical positions with great interest, especially because they concern the entire cultural-historical development from the Middle Ages to the present and involve virtually every aspect of human life. Moreover, the discussion has been deeply intensified ever since Elias's seminal study began to experience its wide-spread reception at least since the 1970s and 80s, and since Duerr's publication of his powerful counter arguments in 1988 and beyond. After all, as we have realized, sexuality in its myriad manifestations determines all other aspects of our existence, including religion, music, philosophy, economics, and sciences. There is no doubt that also medieval art, for instance, teems with open references to sexual objects, and yet we are faced with huge questions as to their proper interpretation regarding function and purpose, as several contributors to this volume confirm on the basis of their investigations.<sup>10</sup> The problem with all these broad theses rests in the common and probably also necessary strategy to generalize, to paint with rough brush strokes, to focus on evidence that confirms the argument and to ignore others. A careful examination of specific texts and images from the early thirteenth through the sixteenth century, which are neither addressed in the Introduction to this volume nor by the other contributors, will illustrate the complexity of the issue and also its relevance for anthropological, cultural-historical, and mental-historical approaches to the critical examination of the emergence of the early modern world.<sup>11</sup>

To do justice to the large, and most significant debate involving such global issues as the history of civilization, history of sexuality, gender relationships in the past, etc., would require a book-length study. In the Introduction I have tried to outline some of the most relevant aspects in this broad discourse both in the premodern world and today within scholarship. Famously, Michel Foucault approached the topic from the perspective of discourse, identifying sexuality as a historical construct to support specific power structures, ultimately specifically gender, relationships,<sup>12</sup> but then he mostly turned to seventeenth- through

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<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Jones, "Sex and Sexuality in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art," *Privatisierung der Triebe?: Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. *Frühneuzeit-Studien*, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1994), 187–304. For an early assessment of the significance of sexuality, see Vern L. Bullough, "Sex in History: A Virgin Field," *The Journal of Sex Research* 1 (1972): 101–16; Sander L. Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History. Representing the Sexual in Medicine and Culture from the Middle Ages to the Age of AIDS* (New York: Wiley, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> A good example for a sensitive treatment of relevant evidence from a social-historical perspective is provided by George Huppert, *After the Black Death: A Social History of Early Modern Europe*. Sec. ed. *Interdisciplinary Studies in History* (1986; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998); for the history of mentality, see *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte: Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1993); for anthropological approaches, see the contribution to *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Britnell (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. I: *An Introduction*, transl. from the French Robert



nineteenth-century French literature. In contrast, choosing a narrowly defined topic, here I would like to examine a selection of Middle High German texts where we come across naked men who mostly feel entirely out of place and express embarrassment.

The intention then is to investigate what these few examples might tell us regarding the attitude toward the human body when exposed to public viewing and what narrative function the phenomenon of nakedness might have within the context of each narrative. I will also consider some art work both from the Middle Ages and the early modern period to support my critical approaches to the Elias-Duerr debate as a springboard for the further discussion of sexuality, the body, shame, and the relationship between the individual and society in the area of intimacy.<sup>13</sup>

Such an investigation promises to yield many insightful results regarding ethical, moral, and ideological perspectives underlying medieval and early modern cultures because it forces us to approach the relevant literary texts from an anthropological and sociological perspective, something which has not been fully realized in Anglophone scholarship where the entire debate concerning Elias and Duerr does not yet seem to have been fully recognized despite numerous translations at least of Elias's work.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, building on some findings in the Introduction, this short study will further sensitize us to the dialectics in the attitude toward sexuality in the Middle Ages and beyond, regularly vacillating between total rejection and condemnation by the Church and other authorities, and full acceptance and realization by numerous individuals in practical terms and in the form of artistic and literary representation.<sup>15</sup>

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Hurley (1976; New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess*, 356–86, traces the international reception process of Elias's hypotheses, including the harsh responses by Duerr.

<sup>14</sup> For some global comments, mostly limited to Elias as a sociologist at large, see Stephen Mannell, *Norbert Elias: Civilization, and the Human Self-Image* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1989); Dennis Smith, *Norbert Elias: A Critical Assessment* (London: Sage, 2000); see also Roger Salerno, *Beyond Enlightenment: Lives and Thoughts of Social Theorists* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); *The Sociology of Norbert Elias*, ed. Steven Loyal and Stephen Quilley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Mary Fulbrook, *Un-Civilizing Processes?: Excess and Transgression in German Society and Culture: Perspectives Debating with Norbert Elias*. *German Monitor*, 66 (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2007). The studies by Hans-Peter Duerr have not yet been translated into English.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Dinzelsbacher, "Mittelalterliche Sexualität – die Quellen," *Privatisierung der Triebe? Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. *Frühneuzeit-Studien*, 1 (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 47–110. See also Ernst Englisch, "Die Ambivalenz in der Beurteilung sexueller Verhaltensweisen im Mittelalter," *id.*, 167–86. See also the contributions to *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin. Transl. Anthony Forster. *Family, Sexuality and Social Relations in Past Times* (1982; Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

Art historians such as Michael Camille have already forged ahead in this regard, discussing the often rather disturbing world of medieval marginal drawings with countless grotesque figures, confusing scenes, and many naked bodies, perhaps mocking the pious reader and spectator, perhaps simply adding humor to a most serious matter.<sup>16</sup> In the margin of a copy of the poem *Les Voeux du Paon* by Jaques de Longuyon from ca. 1350, for instance, we see a naked man who, looking back to the center piece where Fesona and Baudrain are playing a game of chess, points with his finger into his anus, a clearly scatological gesture, specifically contrasting the sophisticated courtly world with the grotesque sphere of the crude, perhaps uncivilized, body with its natural functions.<sup>17</sup>

When young Parzival in Wolfram von Eschenbach's eponymous romance (ca. 1205), on his way to King Arthur, in an effort to free himself from his mother and to grow up to an adult knight, encounters Jeschute in her tent, he does not pay attention to the fact that she is lying practically naked on her bed, although the narrator delights in the description of her limbs, turning even to her private parts, deliberately playing with sexual innuendo.<sup>18</sup> The young man does not even seem to be sexually awake since he only follows his mother's recommendations verbatim, robbing the lady's ring and brooch; then he demands food and finally a kiss from her, though not because he would feel attracted to her erotically. Indeed, young Parzival does not even notice the erotically highly charged situation and simply devours the food and takes whatever he can grab from her according to Herzeloyde's advice. Once he has left her, he only reflects back upon his conquest and delights in his "roub[ ]" (132, 25; robbery) without even considering that he had met this lovely lady in a highly compromising situation not wearing any clothes under the blanket.<sup>19</sup> Nakedness, deftly alluded to by the narrator, has no significant meaning in this situation, obviously because Parzival has not yet developed in sexuality insofar as he is still in a pre-puberty stage, hence he is not

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. Essays in Art and Culture (London: Reaktion Books, 1992). See also Christina Weising's contribution to this volume.

<sup>17</sup> Today in the Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms. G. 24, fol. 25v, see *Medieval Mastery: Book Illumination from Charlemagne to Charles the Bold: 800–1475*, ed. Lee Preedy and William Noel (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2002), 174.

<sup>18</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph.

<sup>19</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht. Einführung zum Text von Bernd Schirok (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), chapter 130, verse 1 to chapter 132, verse 30 (or 130,1–132,30).

yet interested in other bodies,<sup>20</sup> though the narrator certainly includes sexual allusions in his description of Jeschute's condition.

Wolfram takes the young protagonist on a quick development tour, growing up faster than it would seem possible, but the narrative requirement justifies this strategy. When Parzival spends time at Count Gurnemanz's court, he has to learn all the basic educational principles necessary for a member of highly cultured and sophisticated aristocracy, and he is well taken care of by his host. This, however, leads to an embarrassing situation because after dinner Gurnemanz leads his guest to the bedroom and requests from him to undress in preparation for nighttime: "der wirt in sich ûz sloufen bat: / ungernerz tet, doch musez sîn" (166, 12–13; the host begged him to take off his clothes: he did not like it, but it had to be). Once naked and placed in the bed, he is covered by a fine blanket out of ermine coat, and the narrator cannot help it but to comment: "sô werde frucht gebar nie wîp" (166, 16; never before has a woman delivered such noble fruit), underscoring the character quality hidden within a beautiful, and certainly eroticized body the entire court is most curious about.

Once Parzival has woken up the next morning, the servants prepare a bath for him, and he steps right into it. As soon as he sits in the tub, delightful young ladies appear who massage his body, helping him to get rid of painful spots, though he does not respond to any of their comments: "sus dolter freude und eise" (167, 10; thus he experienced joy and bliss). However, when the time has come to get out of the tub, Parzival displays shyness and embarrassment, not daring to accept the bath towel and to wrap it around his body (167, 21–24). In fact, he is filled with shame in this situation: "vor in wolt erz niht umbe nemn" (167, 24), although they would have liked to examine whether his private parts have suffered any damage, or whether he is well, which provokes the narrator to comment, in his typically facetious fashion: "si kan friwendes kumber riuwen" (167, 30; womanhood demonstrates loyalty, she can take away a friend's suffering). Of course, here, as so many times throughout Wolfram's work, we have to consider his deliberate use of satire and irony, and the subsequent comment seems to confirm this perspective: "wîpheit vert mit triuwen" (167, 29; women operate with loyalty).<sup>21</sup>

Duerr had warned us not to read some of the highly erotic imagery from the medieval period too literally, advising us of their allegorical, moral, and religious functions. Referring to a famous illustration in the *Manessische Liederhandschrift*

<sup>20</sup> James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 40–44, argues that the gender markers in medieval courtly literature do not assume the same erotic function as in modern discourse; instead the writers focus their attention on the aphrodisiac body at large, whether male or female.

<sup>21</sup> See Karl Bertau, "Versuch über tote Witze bei Wolfram von Eschenbach," *Acta Germanica* 10 (1977): 87–137; also published in his *Wolfram von Eschenbach: Neun Versuche über Subjektivität und Ursprünglichkeit in der Geschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1983), 60–109; here 87.

(Codex Manesse), the most impressive collection of German courtly love poetry accompanied by full-page images of the individual poets (imaginary) from the early fourteenth century,<sup>22</sup> he insists on the significant difference between erotic and explicitly sexual allusions. For him, it would have been most unlikely that medieval women served men in the bathtub and actually shared, somehow, living space together. But the pictorial evidence included in his own study seems to point to the opposite direction, whether the images reflect marital scenes, sexual encounters between people of the lower classes, genre images of brothels, hospitals, bath houses, etc.<sup>23</sup>

The illustration in the *Codex Manesse* deserves closer attention, and certainly a different interpretation than the one offered by Duerr. The artist offers an illustration of the poet Jakob von Warte (1269–1331), a composer of courtly love songs situated in the Canton Thurgau, Switzerland. We see a naked man sitting in a big wooden bathtub, surrounded by four women, two of whom handing him a wreath of flowers and a chalice, whereas one maid, who kneels next to the tub, massages his right arm, and a fourth woman, apparently a servant considering her size, uses a hand-held bellow to feed a fire under a huge kettle for the warm water. A tall linden tree rises up in the background, and birds are sitting on the leaves, signaling the time of Spring. The man's body is covered, as far as we can see it, with rose leaves, but he seems to be of old age considering his grey hair—apparently a reference to a verse in one of his songs: “Owê, si lât mich in den sorgen alten” (Oh dear, [her refusal] makes me turn old because of worrying).<sup>24</sup> According to Duerr, the entire scene has to be read only allegorically, but even allegories rely on practical experiences and familiarity with basic aspects of contemporary culture; hence the depiction of this man in the bathtub does not evoke any sense of shame, not even in the presence of women.

The depiction of a naked man taking a bath in the illustration contained in the *Manesse Codex* should not surprise us at all, considering all the other evidence. The Duerr-Elias debate has been highly influential particularly for Early Modern Studies insofar as Elias had fundamentally influenced our perspectives on the remarkable paradigm shift from the Middle Ages to the modern world with respect to civilization. Duerr seriously questioned his arguments and observations,

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<sup>22</sup> Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 28; *Codex Manesse: Die Miniaturen der Großen Heidelberger Liederhandschrift*. Ed. and explained by Ingo F. Walther, with Gisela Siebert (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1988), 40.

<sup>23</sup> For a parallel study, involving a significant bathhouse scene in the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre* and also new archeological evidence, see David Townsend, “The Naked Truth of the King's Affection in the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34 (2004): 173–95.

<sup>24</sup> *Die Schweizer Minnesänger*. Nach der Ausgabe von Karl Bartsch neu bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Max Schiendorfer. Vol. 1: *Texte* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990), 23, No. 5, 27.

suggesting that shame belongs to one of the anthropological constants, thereby implying that the civilization process actually did not happen.

This brings us back to Wolfram's portrait of highly self-conscious young Parzival whose foolish youthfulness might be an explanation for his excessive shame. The narrator certainly mocks him and comments that the courtly ladies, who were asked to leave the room and to grant him privacy, would have liked to know whether he had been wounded at his genital as well:

die juncfrouwen muosen gēn:  
sine torsten dā niht langer stēn.  
ich wæn si gerne heten gesehn,  
ob im dort unde iht wære geschehn. (167, 25–28)

[The young ladies had to leave:  
they did not dare to linger there.  
I believe that they would have liked to see  
whether anything had happened to his body at the lower part.]

The humor of the entire scene is predicated on the tension between the young protagonist's lack of experience with womanhood and the courtly ladies' curiosity and teasing of their guest whom they identify with the standard image of a sexualized man constantly bent on conquering women for his personal pleasure.<sup>25</sup> This does not imply at all that Wolfram intended to reflect upon a fundamental concern about shamefulness and embarrassment because of the young man's exposure of his naked body. On the contrary, the explicit satire indicates how little Parzival has learned about courtly culture and still operates like a child among adults, not knowing how to handle his own body in public.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bertau, "Versuch" (cited from his *Wolfram von Eschenbach*), 87, emphasizes the cliché of the notoriously erotic activity of all men, especially of all knights. Within the field of Masculinity Studies, this topic has found much interest, though Wolfram's text has not yet met any significant interest in this regard, see *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley. Women and Men in History (London and New York: Longman, 1999). Surprisingly, when Masculinist scholars turn to Wolfram, they tend to ignore this powerful scene, see, for instance, Susanne Hafner, *Maskulinität in der höfischen Erzählliteratur*. Hamburger Beiträge zur Germanistik, 40 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2004). See my review in *Mediaevistik* 19 (2006): 399–401.

<sup>26</sup> It seems questionable that he simply gets out of the bathtub, forcing the women, because of his nakedness, to leave the room, as if he did not feel shame, as David N. Yeandle argues in his monograph, *'shame' im Alt- und Mittelhochdeutschen bis um 1210: Eine sprach- und literaturgeschichtliche Untersuchung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Herausbildung einer ethischen Bedeutung*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2001), 153–55. For a rather surprising parallel case in *Tristan de Nanteuil*, though with a strongly religious undertone and motif, see the contribution to this volume by Paula Leverage. In that case, the exposure of the body, even in its specific sexual meaning, is done deliberately to demonstrate the divinely inspired gender transformation of the protagonist. There is no sense of

However, physically the guest appears like a young adult, and his presentation at court, after having been splendidly dressed by his host Gurnemanz, evokes great admiration and erotic interest (168, 24–30), which in part confirms James Schultz's recent hypothesis regarding the phenomenon of aristophilia, that is, "radiant nobility," or "nobility of the body."<sup>27</sup> In part, however, Schultz thereby denies the clearly erotic dimension of the female gaze upon the male body.<sup>28</sup> Not surprisingly, when Parzival and Cundwiramurs have married, and spend their first night together, nothing serious happens, and she remains a virgin because he does not dare, or does not want to, touch her. Only on the third night do they overcome the physical distance and discover each other: "man und wîp wærn al ein. / si vlâhten arm unde bein. / ob ichz iu sagen müeze, / er vant daz nâhe süeze: / der alte und der niwe site / wonte aldâ in beiden mite. / in was wol und niht ze wê" (203, 5–11; man and woman were just one. They embraced each other with arms and legs. If I am supposed to tell you, he found sweet closeness: the old and the new custom was realized by both. They felt happy and did not experience woe). We do not need to analyze this passage further because it is clear enough what is happening, and it is a standard description of the joys of a wedding night, or any other first sexual encounters in medieval literature without going into graphic details. Certainly, the poet does not address in explicit terms the fact that husband and wife are lying in bed together naked and are enjoying each other, but he does so implicitly. We are not told anything about their naked bodies because our imagination can do the same job much better based on the simple allusions.

Nakedness is part of the game, yet it is not necessarily associated with embarrassment or shame; rather it entirely depends on the context and the conditions, which significantly contradicts both Elias's and Duerr's theses. It would be erroneous to assume that medieval people cared little about covering their bodies and openly displayed their nakedness even in an inappropriate context, that is, in public. At the same time clothing was highly important, both for social status and for the protection of the naked, shame-associated body, assuming an important ritual value.<sup>29</sup> Depending on the context, women were not excluded

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shame in the scene discussed by Leverage.

<sup>27</sup> Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 79–83, et passim.

<sup>28</sup> Normally, only Christ's naked body was exhibited in public and available for general viewing, whether this evoked erotic intrigue or not. There are, however, numerous examples in literary texts, such as Heinrich von Veldeke's *Eneas*, or in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* where women eagerly look at men's naked physique out of sheer erotic interest. See Michael Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 34–39. For post-medieval perspectives, see *Männlichkeit im Blick: Visuelle Inszenierungen in der Kunst seit der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Mechthild Fend and Marianne Koos. Literatur – Kultur – Geschlecht. Große Reihe, 30 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Elke Brüggem, *Kleidung und Mode in der höfischen Epik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*. Beihefte zum Euphorion, 23 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1989); Gabriele Raudszus, *Die*

from treating wounded male bodies, such as in the case of Gawan after his hard battle on Castle Schastel Marveile. Although seemingly dead, there is life left in his body, and he is carefully disarmed and unclothed so as to allow the women to treat him medically. But the servant women are enjoined to pay respect to him, guarding his honor by not making him ashamed for his nakedness (578, 15–17). His grandmother orders them to use a piece of cloth to cover his genitals, if we can read this into the modest formulation: “einen pfelle sult ir umbe iuch nemen, / unde entwâpentn in dem schate” (578, 18–19; put up a blanket in front of you and take off his armor behind this cover).<sup>30</sup>

Hartmann von Aue illustrated his own approach to this fundamental issue most powerfully in his *Iwein* (ca. 1190), explicitly suggesting that nakedness carried social functions and was not simply and exclusively the site of women’s endangerment within a male society. Once Lunete has announced in public that Iwein has utterly failed in keeping his promise to his wife Laudine to return to her after one year of knightly enterprises, and that she has hence rejected him from her life, the young protagonist falls into a terrible fright, and actually loses his mind. He leaves the court of King Arthur, tears off his clothing, and wanders off into the forest stark naked. The narrator explicitly identifies this action as a radical transgression of all courtly norms of behavior: “er brach sîne site und sîne zuht” (he broke with all good customs and his courtly education).<sup>31</sup>

To be naked means for Iwein to sink down to the level of an animal insofar as he eats only raw meat and roams the forest without any direction. Worse even, as the narrator underscores, Iwein’s comportment indicates that he has lost his mind, which finds additional confirmation in the fact that he is hunting and eating wild animals without cooking them or preparing them with salt or any spices. In other words, his nakedness finds its parallel in his lack of human culture, that is, his inability to treat his raw food. Once Iwein has made contact with an hermit, the latter is not actually shocked by his nakedness, only by his seemingly ferocious behavior, which he can, however, quickly control by means of a simple training process. Offering him bread, he keeps the wild man at bay, who is slowly adapting to the life of a beast: “Sus twelte der unwîse / ze walde mit der spîse, / unz daz der edele tôre / wart gelîch einem môre / an allen sînem lîbe” (3345–49; so the crazy

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*Zeichensprache der Kleidung: Untersuchungen zur Symbolik des Gewandes in der deutschen Epik des Mittelalters.* Ordo. Studien zur Literatur und Gesellschaft des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, 1 (Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olms, 1985), 217–19.

<sup>30</sup> Yeandle, ‘schame’, 159.

<sup>31</sup> Hartmann von Aue, *Iwein*. 4th rev. ed. Text of the seventh ed. by G. F. Benecke, K. Lachmann, and L. Wolff. Trans. and epilogue by Thomas Cramer (1968; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001), 3234.

man stayed in the forest with this kind of food until he, as a noble fool, turned into a black man in all of his bodily appearance).

Remarkably, Iwein's nakedness has only secondary significance; it only reflects on his loss of his mind and loss of culture at large. There is no sense of shame, and no reflection upon sexual embarrassment, particularly because Iwein's nakedness simply equates him with an animal, which removes this case entirely out of the larger debate concerning the process of civilization because nakedness in isolation, far away from human society, has no bearing on the issue itself. Not surprisingly, Duerr has not even considered this scene, obviously because it would have dangerously undermined his larger argument.

The situation is considerably different when Iwein has fallen asleep at a later moment and is discovered by a group of women. However, even here the protagonist is identified as animal-like, bereft of reason and clothing (3359–60), which justifies that one of the women can examine him closely in order to identify him, not expressing any sense of shame or embarrassment (3369–71). Nevertheless, she breaks out in tears because Iwein is so miserably exposed and dishonored in his nakedness. But she does not cry because possibly her female sense of shame has been hurt, looking at a naked man. On the contrary, her heart is filled with pity and sympathy for Iwein in his fallen state: "daz einem alsô vrumen man / diu swacheit solde geschehen / daz er in den schanden wart gesehen" (3392–94; that a virtuous man would have to experience the dishonor of being seen in such a shameful state).

One of three women recognizes Iwein and also the cause of his loss of mind due to painful experiences in love (3404–05). Appealing to her mistress that only a healthy Iwein recovered from his insanity would be able to help them in their political and legal conflict, she can convince her to share some of the magical salve that she had received from the fairy Feimorgân.<sup>32</sup> But the lady seriously enjoins her to use the salve only very sparingly, threatening her even with the death penalty if she does not obey her (3439). The salve would have to serve exclusively for those small areas where the seat of Iwein's sickness is located, his head, and the rest she would want to use for many other people suffering from similar medical-mental problems. Nevertheless, the maid ignores this order as soon as she has returned to the sleeping hero, entirely enthralled by his masculine beauty. The text does not reveal too many details of the erotic experience, as we are only told that the maid spreads the salve over his entire body, using it up completely: "mit ter vil edelen salben / bestreich si in allenthalben / über houbet und über vüezen" (3475–77; she

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Meister, *The Healing Female in the German Courtly Romance*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 523 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990), 49–70. See now Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Literature* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), especially 11–12.



spread the most valuable salve everywhere from the head to the feet). The operative words are: from head to toes, obviously not leaving out any part of Iwein's body. The narrator underscores: "ir wille was sô süeze / daz sî daz alsô lange treip / unz in der bühsen niht beleip" (3478–80; her mind was so sweet that she did it for such a long time [applying the salve] until nothing was left in the box).

The narrator tries hard to hide the fact that she has thoroughly treated his entire body, and offers the seemingly innocent explanation that she was ardently bent on healing him from his insanity: "und wær ir sehsstunt mê gewesen: / sô gerne sach sî in genesen" (3485–86; and if there had been six times as much [of the salve], she was so desirous to see him healed). Knowing, however, that for Iwein it would be highly shameful if he knew that she had seen him naked, not to speak of her thorough massage of all his body parts, she then withdraws and hides, making sure that she can observe him clearly, whereas he would not know of her presence (3488–501). We are told in unmistakable terms that Iwein would be ashamed if he knew that she had seen him naked (3497). At the same time she observes him carefully, making sure that the salve indeed shows its effect and that Iwein puts on the clothes that she had placed next to him. Moreover, once he is dressed and no longer exposed in his nakedness, she pretends to come riding along without noticing him at first, thus assuring that Iwein believes in her acting, responding to his calling out to her only the second time (3614).<sup>33</sup>

After the protagonist has woken up from his sleep and deep dream, he debates with himself for a long time about his identity and what he would like to be, and what he actually is, a knight, though he has lost all memory of his previous existence. It is a most remarkable passage about an analytic examination concerning the meaning of identity and self-realization, hardly ever matched in medieval literature, perhaps with the exception of Petrarch's reflections while on Mont Ventoux (1336), and of Thomas Hoccleve's (ca. 1367–1426) ruminations about himself while looking into a mirror, knowing full well that people will remember that he had suffered from insanity.<sup>34</sup>

For our purpose, however, the crucial aspect proves to be the voyeuristic situation although we do not hear about the maid's feelings and specific concerns

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<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," *The History of Religions* 5, 2 (1966): 217–38, discusses the religious significance of taking off clothes for the religious ritual of baptism in the history of early Christianity, which could have a significant impact on our discussion of Iwein's nudity and subsequent reversal to sanity once he has been 'anointed' and then taken on clothes again. I thank Siegfried Christoph for alerting me to this valuable study.

<sup>34</sup> Albrecht Classen, *Autobiographische Lyrik des europäischen Spätmittelalters. Studien zu Hugo von Montfort, Oswald von Wolkenstein, Antonio Pucci, Charles d'Orléans, Thomas Hoccleve, Michel Beheim, Hans Rosenplüt und Alfonso Alvarez de Villasandino*. *Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur*, 91 (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi, 1991), 57–69; 223–38.

during her observations while Iwein is waking up and slowly recovering his senses. The narrator refers to her again only once the knight is fully dressed: "Nu ersach diu juncvrouwe daz / daz er unlasterlîchen saz" (3597–98; now the maid saw that he was sitting there without causing any embarrassment). At the risk of an anachronistic reading of the text, I would claim that the erotic dimension of this entire scene is undeniable, though there is no specific mention of the woman's feelings, probably because she belongs to a lower social class.

To be sure, female voyeurism permeates the situation, with the maid gazing at the man carefully and intently, whose body she has touched all over while he was asleep. Of course, there would have been embarrassment for him if she had stayed around and made him know her presence, but this has little, or no, bearing on Duerr's or Elias's hypotheses regarding shame culture and its role within the process of civilization. On the contrary, the maid demonstrates, at least indirectly, her fascination with the male body, probably her erotic interest, and yet also her sensitivity in keeping a secure distance to avoid his feeling ashamed because of his nakedness.<sup>35</sup> There is also a social difference between them, which would have increased Iwein's shame, whereas an erotic encounter between a man and a woman from the same class, as we hear about it countless times in medieval literature, is normally entirely free of shame<sup>36</sup>

We would have to agree with Duerr that Hartmann provided us here with an example of a man potentially being ashamed because of being exposed to a woman's erotic gazing of his body.<sup>37</sup> But by the same token, we cannot use this passage as evidence that courtly knights felt the same degree of shame as all people in every culture and in every historical period. First, Iwein would have felt deeply embarrassed because he would have been discovered in a shameful social position; next his nakedness is intensified through his dirty appearance, making him look like a black man (3505). Most important, however, the maid is not ashamed at all to massage Iwein's naked body, and she does not mind watching him secretly from the distance, which provides a double voyeuristic perspective, that is, her own and that of the audience. Ultimately, Hartmann has simply projected a most sophisticated and complex scene where the exposed body speaks

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<sup>35</sup> For a broader discussion of voyeurism, though not with regard to this scene, either in Chrétien's *Yvain* or in Hartmann's *Iwein*, see A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 75–96.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, the charming scene of Mai's and Beaflo's wedding night in the eponymous courtly-sentimental romance from ca. 1270. At first both spend a long time praying, until he finally carries her over to the bed, but then they are both embarrassed. Only when Mai's sexual instinct sets in do they both overcome their shame and join in love making. *Mai und Beaflo*. Herausgegeben, übersetzt, kommentiert und mit einer Einleitung von Albrecht Classen. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 6 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2006), 3607–702. The narrator explicitly discusses both their feelings of shame in that crucial moment, 3676–81.

<sup>37</sup> Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 31.

its own language as to the significance of cultural development. Iwein's nakedness does not indicate that medieval people felt less shame than people in the modern period, as Elias would have argued; and it does not indicate that people always and everywhere have felt the same degree of shame because it would be an anthropological constant. The key components rather prove to be that Iwein's lack of clothing and lack of reason reflect his being outside of courtly culture and his great need for help to recover his former status and position.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Parzival was ashamed because he was not yet familiar with courtly culture and did not know how to operate properly even among and with the ladies. At the same time, both the ladies at Gurnemanz's court and the maid in Hartmann's romance are specifically characterized as erotically charged and most curious about the male naked body. This would not mean that we would have to discount countless other interpretations regarding this one scene as the cathartic moment of Iwein's transformation from an ostracized knight without care for his social context to a fully-fledged and responsible member of courtly society. However, this short episode demonstrates how we can use a literary text from the late twelfth century as evidence for fundamental anthropological and social-historical perspectives regarding people's interaction and the basic value system.

Irrespective of religious or ethical aspects influencing the women's curiosity in Wolfram's and Hartmann's text, whether they are simply concerned about the man's well-being or worried about his recovery from insanity, both narratives also suggest a strong erotic interest on the part of those gazing upon the male body. Their voyeurism, however, is also predicated on the sense of shame both on the part of the observed and the observer; otherwise the women's gazes would be meaningless.<sup>39</sup> Considering, then, these ambiguous positions with regard to the naked male body, neither Elias's global hypothesis about the increasing shame

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<sup>38</sup> Surprisingly, Yeandle, 'shame', does not even consider this extreme case of a shameful situation. Other scholars have examined the religious dimension, political issues, and structural elements revealed in this episode, but the fact of Iwein's nakedness has actually not been of any significant concern for literary historians, see Will Hasty, *Adventures in Interpretation: The Works of Hartmann von Aue and Their Critical Reception*. Literary Criticism in Perspective (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), 89–90. Amazingly, Susan L. Clark, *Hartmann von Aue: Landscapes of Mind* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1989), 187–88, though acknowledging Iwein's nakedness while spending time in the forest, entirely disregards the critical moment when he is discovered by the three ladies, shamefully exposed in his nakedness.

<sup>39</sup> There is mostly research on men's scopic interests in women, particularly during the Middle Ages, see, for instance, Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001). Women's interest in men, strangely, has not been the topic of any serious research, as far as I can tell. But see Raymond Cormier, "Woman's Ways of Feeling: Lavinia's Innovative Discourse of/on/about Love in the *Roman d'Eneas*," *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 347 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, forthcoming), 111–27.

level since the end of the Middle Ages as a marker of an intensified cultural sensitivity and new level in the history of civilization, nor Duerr's anthropological claims concerning the timeless experience of shame among all peoples at all times hold water completely.

But let us take a look at two further examples, one of which Duerr had also examined, surprisingly not knowing anything about the actual author and the literary-historical context.<sup>40</sup> The thirteenth-century Middle High German didactic poet The Stricker composed two verse narratives that are predicated on the appearance of a naked men among courtly society.<sup>41</sup> The Stricker was predominantly concerned with the well-being of people within their society, within marriage, with foolishness, proper behavior, ignorance, violence against women, lack of self-control, hypocrisy, and other virtues and vices.<sup>42</sup> In "Der nackte Bote," contained in Codex 2885, today housed in the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek*, Vienna, among five other manuscripts,<sup>43</sup> a lord orders his servant, or squire, to ride ahead and to announce his arrival at one of his estates. It is early evening in Fall, and the temperatures are already dropping, but the landlord of the estate has the habit of not heating his living quarters until the arrival of winter. However, at least the bathroom is heated, so all the women withdraw there to do their work ("werkghadem," 63), instead of using it for its original purpose. But the servant does not know about this arrangement, and when he learns from an imbecile child outside that the landlord would be found in the bathroom, he naively assumes that the latter is taking a bath and is being shorn by a barber. That is not the case at all, but the servant has not inquired further because he is not a very smart person ("ouch was er tumbes muotes," 20) and lacks in circumspection. Looking forward to a pleasant treatment in the heated

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<sup>40</sup> Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 31–32; 355, note 24, with a wrong attribution to Hartmann von Aue. In general, any close examination of Duerr's sources and references would indicate considerable ignorance and naive reliance on secondary sources, which altogether led him to commit a number of mistakes, forcing us to conclude that since the basis of his arguments is so poorly built, the larger conclusions do not necessarily hold either. This is not to deny that his theoretical position has been deeply influential and fruitful, forcing us to reconsider Elias's position much more carefully.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Strohschneider, "The Dual Economy of Medieval Life," *A New History of German Literature*, ed. David E. Wellbery and Judith Ryan (Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 112–16.

<sup>42</sup> See my study "Love and Marriage and the Battle of Genders in the Stricker's *maeren*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* XCII, 1 (1991): 105–22.

<sup>43</sup> Der Stricker, *Verserzählungen*. Vol. I, ed. Hanns Fischer. 2nd, newly rev. ed. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 53 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967), 110–24. For recent studies on The Stricker, though without any direct bearing on our issue, see *Die Kleinepik des Strickers: Texte, Gattungstraditionen und Interpretationsprobleme*, ed. Emilio González und Victor Millet. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 199 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006).

room, the servant quickly undresses and moves toward the bathroom, entirely naked, believing that he would meet the lord of the house there all by himself (65). At that moment he is attacked by a vicious dog, which he fends off with one of the bath fans that he had found lying outside.

These are important objects for the further understanding of the narrative development because they confirm his opinion that he is indeed about to enter the bath where everyone has taken off his/her clothing (67–68). Because of the dog, the servant has to turn the other way, fighting him off, and so he enters the bathroom backwards, quickly slamming the door shut, not aware of the actual situation that the entire family has refunctionalized this space to do their work in a comfortable temperature

The shocked women are deeply embarrassed being confronted by this naked man and cover their eyes (84–85). The landlord alone gazes at the servant, deeply troubled and irate, yelling at him, asking who he is and what his intention might be. The servant realizes only now his great transgression, being the sole person who is naked in the company of all the women and the head of the household, and so he feels deeply embarrassed. But he does not waste a second and immediately leaves the room, grabs his clothing, jumps on the horse and races off, back to his master. But the furious host follows him, ready to kill him so as to avenge the assumed humiliation that he had to suffer by the naked servant. Once the lord has learned about the fiasco, he follows the servant, gets hold of him and is about to strike him with his sword and to blind him (178–79), when he is finally told what had actually happened.

Only now does the truth come out, and both the servant's master and the landlord stand corrected in their rash reactions. The latter had believed that the servant had intended to rob him of his honor by exhibiting himself naked to the entire family as a deliberate affront (136–37). The lord, on the other hand, had believed the insulted man's words without questioning him about the circumstances, and only when the servant begs him for mercy and to allow him to tell his side of the story does he finally understand what had happened. Interestingly, the humiliated landlord comes to his assistance, encouraging the nobleman to let his servant speak first because he does not comprehend the latter's motivation to insult him and all the female members of his family (172–75).

After the servant has related all the details, especially referring to the dangerous dog and the foolish child, the lord is greatly relieved that he did not follow through with his first reaction because he would have become guilty of murder (198–201). Like the other man, who had been the victim of the alleged insult, he had reached the conclusion too quickly that the servant had performed that way because he wanted to belittle the entire family. The landlord who had felt so insulted at least had encouraged the nobleman to give his servant a chance to speak up (170–75). Remarkably, the narrator's final criticism, contained in his

epimythion, addresses this issue only, that is, the danger of jumping to quick conclusions without having verified or falsified any of the claims. The true conflict rests in the perception that the lord has of his servant's behavior, based on the superficial account by the other man. Afraid of having been dishonored by his own servant, he is more than willing to strike quickly and to blind him, obviously unjustly, as he later admits himself once he has learned the truth, full of relief not having committed a crime (203–04). The narrator concludes with general remarks about the danger of rash decisions and trusting first and mostly deceptive impressions ("wân," 213) that could take away one's honor (218–19).

Does this mean that The Stricker implied nakedness to be shameful? Although the narrative does not explicitly address this issue, which demonstrates how inappropriately Duerr interpreted the text for an entirely different purpose, almost alien to the story itself, it still allows us to raise the question why the servant's nakedness caused such an uproar. The problem is much more complex than the anthropologist's reading insinuates. If the lord and his family had taken a bath, that is, if they all had been naked for the purpose of cleansing themselves, nothing particular would have happened, and there would have certainly not been the kind of reaction as the one described in the narrative. Communal bathing, hence, if we can trust the relevance of this literary account, was a normal practice in the Middle Ages, and offering a guest a bath at the moment of his/her arrival was rather common, though this would not necessarily take away the erotic dimension of the exposed body under special circumstances.<sup>44</sup> But the exhibition of the naked body in public represented, as to be expected, a considerable degree of embarrassment for both sides, unless there were other circumstances, such as differences in social status.

At any rate, The Stricker presents a rather complex situation in his narrative because the servant would have been fully within the limits of cultural expectations if the host also would have used the bathroom for its original purpose, instead of spending time there with the entire family because it is the only heated space. But the servant enters the room walking backwards because he needs to defend himself against the dog, which makes the entire setting even worse for him, understandably forcing the landlord to believe that the young man's behavior was supposed to achieve an insult to his honor. But later the nobleman understands that his servant had not intended anything like that and had only been a victim of unfortunate circumstances. Nakedness as such, for the purpose of taking a bath, would not have been embarrassing because, as the narrative context indicates, all other bathers would have been naked as well. However,

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<sup>44</sup> Danielle Régnier-Bohler, "Imagining the Self," *Revelations of the Medieval World*, ed. Georges Duby. A History of Private Life, II (1985; Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988), 313–94; here 365–66.

nakedness of only one person within the company of people all clothed and not ready for this encounter constitutes an insult, a breach of honor, indeed. Nevertheless, the poet does not really demonstrate any concern with the issue of the exposed body. The key issue, by contrast, proves to be his warning not to reach a conclusion too quickly and first to learn everything necessary about it before making any decision. The nobleman would have committed a grave sin if he had blinded the servant only on the basis of the words by the irate host. Of course, the narrative is predicated on the shameful experience of nakedness on the part of the servant, but the criticism and real concern are only directed at those people who judge without the full knowledge of all aspects leading to the crisis.

Another fascinating example of the clash between a naked man and the rest of society can be found in The Stricker's "Der nackte Ritter," in which the key person is involuntarily disrobed.<sup>45</sup> The reason is very simple, since the entire family is sitting in a heated room, together with their guest, a highly esteemed knight, who strangely enough does not want to take off his coat although he is visibly perspiring. The host has already made himself comfortable, and he cannot understand why the knight adamantly refuses to follow his example. To understand the context, we also need to keep in mind that the host's wife and his beautiful three daughters are present as well. They all harbor great liking for the guest and would love to honor him in any possible way. Although the host seriously admonishes the knight to relax and to take off his coat, the guest insists on keeping his coat on at all costs because it would be an "unzuht" (49; lack of education, or good manners) if he did so. The problem develops because of a critical misunderstanding between them, both highly concerned about courtly manners. The host emphasizes, "ich weiz wol, daz ir hövisch sît" (54; I know well that you are courtly), not comprehending at all what the knight's concern might be. So he secretly orders his servants to approach the knight from behind and to pull off the coat by surprise (63). This happens, but to the utter dismay of all present this exposes the knight in his nakedness because he does not wear anything underneath the coat, whether out of poverty or for any other reason. Everyone is deeply shocked, if not horrified about the embarrassing situation. It

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<sup>45</sup> Der Stricker, *Verserzählungen*, 126–31; see also Christopher Young, "At the End of the Tale: Didacticism, Ideology and the Medieval German Märe," *Mittelalterliche Novellistik im europäischen Kontext: Kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektive*, ed. Mark Chinca, Timo Reuvekamp-Felber, and Christopher Young (Berlin: Schmidt; 2006), 24–47; here 39, emphasizes that the narrator ultimately intended to demonstrate how to maintain courtliness "by keeping the covers on." See also the radical social-critical interpretation offered by Otfrid Ehrismann in his commentary to Der Stricker, *Erzählungen, Fabeln, Reden*. *Mittelhochdeutsche / Neuhochdeutsch*. Herausgeben, übersetzt und kommentiert (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992), 258. He believes that the poet intended to reveal the false illusion of traditional aristocracy since the naked man is nothing but a "Scheinritter," whose exhibition also deconstructs the traditional class system that had supported him.

is embarrassing both for the host and his family and for the knight (71–79), but there is no solution, except hasty retreat, which the knight does, but the damage is done, and his formerly friendly relationship with the host is severely undermined: “und schiet sô zornlîche dan, / daz er dem wirte niemer mê / sô holt wart, als er was ê” (88–90; he left so filled with wrath that he was never again as friendly inclined to the host as before).

Again, does *The Stricker* truly examine the nature and meaning of nakedness, shame, and the erotic gaze? No one likes to see the knight naked, and they are perhaps even more embarrassed than him because they had been accustomed to regard the guest as a highly honorable person who could demand great respect (75–76). But it is not nakedness as such that creates this uproar. And there is no sense of eroticism here. On the contrary, it is embarrassing to discover that this worthy knight is obviously so poor that he cannot even afford pants and a shirt. Although the host had tried his best to make the guest feel comfortable and at home, he had involuntarily exposed him so badly that their relationship is destroyed henceforth.

In his epimythion, the narrator underscores that all hosts should be more sensitive to their guests’ explicit wishes and not force anything upon them (91–94). All good service and gifts would be a waste if they are forced upon a person. According to *The Stricker*, the person who imposes his service upon another would cause more damage than do good. Of course, the knight’s naked appearance leads to a deep sense of shame on all sides, but this would not have a direct bearing on the general discussion whether medieval culture was equally sensitive to shame as the modern world (Duerr), or whether it was less inhibited than we are today (Elias), which in itself seems to be a highly questionable notion.<sup>46</sup>

The really important issue that matters here more than anything else is the proper courtly behavior, the need to achieve a good communication, to pay respect to another person’s wishes, and to be tolerant of unexpected behavior. In fact, the host seems to have more reason to feel ashamed than the knight because he imposed himself improperly on him and exposed the knight’s naked body to the gaze of his entire family. Nakedness as such is not the topic of this narrative. However, to appear naked suddenly and without one’s own free will in an embarrassing context constitutes the core issue of *The Stricker*’s interest. As Danielle Régnier-Bohler observes, “The male nude was always seen as an exile from a world of authority and order, or as a destroyer or opponent of order,

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<sup>46</sup> Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess*, 282–95. He also points out that despite increasing public exposure of the body, new unwritten rules come into play today, 288: “Entsprechend dem stillschweigenden Verhaltenscode am Strand dürfen Männer barbusige Frauen nicht zu direkt, zu lange, zu intensiv oder gar lüstern anschauen.”



nudity signifies anarchy . . . . Nudity is a transitional stage . . . male regress toward savagery, abandoning the group's cultural signs."<sup>47</sup>

A lot depends on the context, on the specific situation, the social status of the naked man, and also the generic context in which this naked person appears. This can be nicely illustrated, finally, with several examples from the poetic work of the South-Tyrolean poet Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/1377–1445) who included a number of songs that would either have to be interpreted as pornographic, or as marital songs simply for private entertainment.<sup>48</sup> Probably because of his utter disregard for public opinions about his songs, Oswald was in a unique position to compose his songs as it pleased him. In "Ain tunckle farb" (Kl. 33), for instance, he laments about his absent wife, Gret, which makes him extremely uncomfortable at night. Whenever he wakes up and realizes that she is not with him in bed, he experiences a great shock insofar as a large rat frightens him: "Kom, höchster schatz! mich schreckt ain ratz mit grossem tratz" (30; Come, greatest treasure! I am frightened by a rat with a large claw), which refers to nothing but his own genital. Imagining, in contrast, her presence, he describes how the bed would creak from all the movement in their intense love making (34–36). Of course, the poet presents himself alone in bed in the middle of the night, but the open discussion of his sexual desires in a song that would ultimately be presented in public, even if only within the small circle of friends and relatives, indicates an uncomplicated attitude toward the naked body and hence sexuality.

In "Wol auff, wol an" (Kl. 75), we encounter the poet taking a bath together with his wife, surrounded by a Spring-like environment where every creature and plant exudes joy and happiness. The poet openly talks about his wife and himself playing with each other's body, rubbing, touching, and playing together freely and without any constraints, especially free of all sense of shame. The song leaves nothing unspoken and presents in dramatic fashion a highly erotic scene which deftly contradicts the claims by the anthropologist, Duerr, without necessarily supporting the assumptions by the sociologist, Elias, that here we still find a testimony of medieval culture, whereas such songs would be impossible in the Renaissance: "lass uns kuttren: / 'wascha, maidli, / mir das schaidli!' / 'reib mich, knäblin, / umb das näblin! / hilfst du mir, / leicht vachir dir das rätzli'" (33–39; let us flirt: 'wash, young woman, my head!' Rub me, young man, around my belly

<sup>47</sup> Régnier-Bohler, "Imagining the Self," 368.

<sup>48</sup> For a literary-historical introduction, see Alan Robertshaw, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: The Myth and the Man*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 178 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1977); for a historical-critical edition, see *Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, ed. Karl Kurt Klein. Musikanhang von Walter Salmen, 3rd ed., neu bearbeitete und erweiterte Auflage von Hans Moser, Norbert Richard Wolf und Notburga Wolf. Altddeutsche Textbibliothek, 55 (1962; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987). For a critical, unfortunately rather biased and selective review of Oswald research, see Johannes Spicker, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: Die Lieder*. Klassiker-Lektüren, 10 (Berlin: Schmidt, 2007).

button! If you help me, I might perhaps grab your little rat [penis]). And in “Ain graserin” (Kl. 76), directly based on the traditional genre of the pastourelle, we come across a young man who offers his help to a grass-cutting woman. In preparation for the labor he has whetted his little ax to make it stand up, which leaves nothing to guess, as their short exchange signals: “‘zuck nicht, mein schatz! ‘simm nain ich, lieber Jense!’” (18; ‘do not jerk, my treasure! ‘Oh no, my dear Jack, I for sure will not’).<sup>49</sup> The humor of this song is predicated on the direct gaze on the nude body, which would find numerous parallels particularly in the rich narrative literature composed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>50</sup>

In a famous *Medieval Housebook* from ca. 1480, recently edited by Christoph Graf zu Waldburg Wolfegg, we find many illustrations that confirm our findings, in specific contradiction to the claims made by Elias and Duerr both regarding the fundamental paradigm shift (Elias) and the allegedly fundamental, unchanging conditions in man’s attitude toward nakedness and sexuality. The artists present a wide arrange of everyday scenes characteristic of an aristocratic lifestyle, and so also a bathhouse in which men and women spend time together in the tub, debating, for instance, or listening to music. Their naked bodies are clearly visible, but there is no clear sense of shamefulness or moral impropriety. Of course, here we are dealing, as in all other cases, with an artistic projection, but as such it obviously culled from rather common concepts, even if only in a dream-like setting. At any rate, it would likewise not confirm Elias’s theory regarding unabashed acceptance of nudity during the Middle Ages in contrast to later periods with much stricter, shame controlled rules determining normal, real life. Despite the seemingly open display of nudity, that assumption is not quite correct.<sup>51</sup> Certainly, we can gaze into the bathroom, and the public seems to be

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<sup>49</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Rasma Lazda-Cavers who examines important allusions to oral sex in Oswald’s poetry, shedding interesting light on how much a careful and thorough analysis of specific poetic images can reveal about double-entendres, innuendoes, and private experiences obliquely expressed in poems and songs for public performance.

<sup>50</sup> See my discussion of this phenomenon in the Introduction to this volume, pertaining, for instance, to Martin Montanus, Wolfgang Lindener, or Giovanni Straparola. See also my article, “Didactic Laughter through the Literary Discourse: Martin Montanus as Entertainers and Social Critics. Chaos Theory or Epistemological Enlightenment Through Laughter?,” to appear in: *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*.

<sup>51</sup> Elias, *Über den Prozeß*, Vol. 1, 287–301, commenting, for instance, on the picture for Mars, erroneously believes that “Hier wird einfach erzählt, wie der Ritter die Welt sieht und fühlt” (293; the narrator simply tells how a knight sees the world and how he feels about it). This applies, for him at least, to the other images as well. Duerr, *Nacktheit*, 37, with respect to the picture for Venus, argues that the space with the bath is not a geometric one, but a space with meaning (“Bedeutungsraum”) (see Elias, 294). But this does not imply that the interest in sexuality and nudity was less prevalent and displayed publicly. Nevertheless, we would be equally wrong to conclude that hence the attitudes toward nakedness and shame in the Middle Ages were

present as well, as documented by various entertainers, such as a musician, perhaps also a singer. Nevertheless, it is an exclusive space, separated from the hard life outside, hence a dreamlike setting, almost comparable to a utopian scene for an aristocratic audience.

By the same token there is no necessity or any convincing reason to accept Duerr's claim, indirectly reiterated by Waldburg Wolfegg in 1998, that the artist here presented a brothel for the high class.<sup>52</sup> Despite their somewhat fictional character, the illustrations of the various planets, certainly allegorical-astrological in some sense, repeatedly show scenes of nude couples, such as in the plate for Venus, where we have a setting almost identical to the one described by Oswald von Wolkenstein. Whereas many noble people are ambulating around, some are dancing, and others are playing music, in the lower left corner a naked woman steps into a tub where a naked man is welcoming her lovingly, while a go-between is waiting outside with food and drink for their refreshment.<sup>53</sup> The art work contained in this *Housebook* seems rather unusual at first sight, but it can be easily situated in long-standing and long-lasting traditions of medieval manuscript illustrations for erotic love poetry, such as the *Codex Manesse*.

In fact, examining late-medieval and early-modern German and European literature, and also the arts, we would actually discover, perhaps not so surprisingly, an ever growing corpus of highly erotic texts and explicitly sexual, and at times even "pornographic" images, whether we think of Heinrich Wittenwiler, Poggio Bracciolini, the chronicler Froben Christof von Zimmern, Gianfrancesco Straparola, Martin Montanus, and many others, and so also complimentary drawings, paintings, and even sculpture.<sup>54</sup> Neither nudity nor open sexuality was far away from people's minds, and they deliberately, perhaps frivolously, focused on countless scenes involving nakedness, sexuality, and many other forms of cultural transgression, if we would really be justified in labeling the phenomenon as such.

If we continued with our investigation into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we would quickly discover a continuous stream of rather outlandish, grotesque, or plainly sexual, at times even pornographic art, numerous times involving naked men as well, or naked couples caught in the act itself, as best

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considerably different than in the modern world. See the illustration in Gertrud Blaschitz's contribution to this volume.

<sup>52</sup> Christoph Graf Zu Waldburg Wolfegg, *Venus and Mars: The World of the Medieval Housebook* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 1998), 45. The illustration is on 46–47. See also a copy as Fig. 10 in Gertrud Blaschitz's contribution to this volume.

<sup>53</sup> *Venus and Mars*, 36–37. See Duerr's interpretation, 34–37, which exhausts itself in rejecting Elias's theory, without reaching any new perspective on its own.

<sup>54</sup> Some of them even played with the mythical idea of the chastity belt, see Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt: A Myth-Making Process*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2007).

illustrated by the notorious *L'Academie des Dames, ou les sept entretiens galants d'Aloisia*—allegedly a discussion between the courtly lady Aloisia Sigea, or Luisa Sigea (b. ca. 1530), and the lawyer for the Parliament of Grenoble, Nicolas Chorier (1622–1692), first translated by the Dutch scholar Joannes Meursius (1613–1653) from Spanish into Latin.<sup>55</sup> It cannot be the place here to list the vast corpus of corresponding erotic texts and art work from the entire early modern period, and it would actually not be required to revisit this vast area of interest in the sexual, hence the human body as a scopophilic, erotic object to confirm how much shame as a moral force cannot be simply used for anthropological arguments of the kind proposed by Duerr.

At closer examination, we can also observe that the claims held by Elias with regard to the cultural development do not stand up to careful scholarly criticism because educational efforts, cultural constraints and demands on the individual, highly advanced features of a civilizing process that foreshadowed early modern culture by several hundred years can already be discovered as early as in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, turning to the early Middle Ages, we discover countless examples of apotropaic figures at church buildings all over Europe, many of them male, with fully exposed bodies, often with a specific focus on the genitals.<sup>57</sup> Of course, these had a rather different function than high and late-medieval references to naked people taking a bath together. Nevertheless, the common denominator proves to be the generally more relaxed attitude toward the naked body which was treated as an important signifier for a range of purposes free of shame.

Nevertheless, the open and unabashed interest in the sexual, the naked body, hence in the erotic in its full physicality was never completely suppressed, if this term might even capture the true sense of the efforts by the authorities to control public mores since, roughly speaking, the sixteenth century. On the contrary, as Count Froben Christoph von Zimmern (1519–1566) mirrored in the plentiful tales contained in his voluminous chronicle, and as Judith J. Hurwich now observes, “Although the authors of these tales sometimes suggest that a cuckolded husband might take revenge on his rival by seducing the latter’s own wife, they rarely invoke the motif of the husband killing the lover . . . . Not only premarital sex but extramarital sex is treated in the tales as essentially comic; it may cause social conflict, but it does not lead to fatal consequences.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt*, 142–44.

<sup>56</sup> See the contributions to *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004).

<sup>57</sup> Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), 80–99. See also the contribution to this volume by Christina Weising.

<sup>58</sup> Judith J. Hurwich, *Noble Strategies: Marriage and Sexuality in the Zimmern Chronicle*. Sixteenth

We could also add that for him, like for many, if not most, of his contemporaries, and also the subsequent generations, the naked body was not necessarily the object of shame and embarrassment. The interest in sexuality itself has continued, and actually seems to have increased, to be a matter of great interest that is publicly debated and dealt with in often rather shocking openness—especially today. Basically, it seems time to dismiss some of the grandiose theories espoused first by Elias, then by Duerr, and to return to the evidence in plain view and to examine it in a sober, objective fashion. Sure, there are basic facts common to all people, and sure, there is a constant historical process going on, since we all evolve, though not necessarily to the better.<sup>59</sup>

However, ‘civilization’ is a rather pompous, if not problematic, word, and to idealize the present in contrast to the past along those lines suddenly reveals itself as a rather superficial approach to cultural history.<sup>60</sup> After all, scopophilia, voyeurism, crude sexuality, pornography, and the simple interest in the naked body have continued to intrigue audiences and spectators throughout time.<sup>61</sup> Certainly, external pressures to suppress sexuality, whether through legal measures or religious and ethical forces, by way of the police or public criticism intensified throughout the centuries, but the discourse concerning this conflict can be found already in the early Middle Ages and was not necessarily a marker of modernity.<sup>62</sup>

By the same token, Duerr was also right in arguing that shame and embarrassment are fundamental experiences in human life at all times and in all cultures. However, as soon as we investigate specific texts, images, and social aspects and trace their context, development or historical continuity, we face serious problems both with the sociological approach and with the anthropological analysis. Nakedness was a significant problem also in the Middle Ages, and

Century Essays & Studies, 75 (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2006), 180.

<sup>59</sup> Hans Peter Duerr, in his follow-up volume, *Intimität. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*, 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), defends himself energetically against the charges by the Elias partisans by pointing out, for instance, the increased control of public mores by the guilds and the urban authorities (20–24). However, here he simply turns to the penal system and does not consider that its existence, in the first place, confirms the prevalence of transgressive acts and the continued open discourse and practice of sexuality at various social levels.

<sup>60</sup> See also the excellent review of the key issues involved in the entire debate about the history of sexuality by Franz X. Eder, “‘Sexualunterdrückung’ oder ‘Sexualisierung’? Zu den theoretischen Ansätzen der ‘Sexualitätsgeschichte’,” *Privatisierung der Triebe?: Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. *Frühneuzeit-Studien*, 1 (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1994), 7–29.

<sup>61</sup> Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur*, chapters 13 and 14, 249–82.

<sup>62</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Peter Dinzelsbacher. For the case from the tenth century, see *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. with an introd. and notes by Paolo Squatriti. *Medieval Texts in Translations* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 11–14.

because of its complex functions in public and private, in the religious and the literary realm, it cannot serve well as a benchmark to determine the difference between one cultural-historical period and another. In some cases we observe clear expressions of shame, in others the situation is quite different. Both poets and artists delighted in playing with allusions to the naked body because it added intriguing new perspectives regarding the individual's personal development, his or her status within society, and the public attitude toward the mighty and powerful, on the one hand, and the poor and marginalized members on the other.



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## The Exposed Body and the Gendered *Blemmye*: Reading the *Wonders of the East*<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Naked or Nude?

The fascinating beings of the late-tenth-century Old English encyclopedic *Wonders of the East* appear in states that range from the regally clothed to the fully unclothed.<sup>2</sup> We begin with the question: Are the unclothed wonders naked or nude? The question is neither hair-splitting nor a simple matter of terminology: as we ask, “Naked or nude?” we ask, “In what way do we consider this body to be exposed? What function does the exposure of the body serve? What is the relation between the image of the exposed body and the creature it represents? What is the place of the representation in the cultural iconography? How does the exposure of the body posit or elide identity for the subject of the representation? How does the exposure of the body position it with respect to its viewer? What does the exposure of the body allow from, or require of its viewer?”

Kenneth Clark’s *The Nude* stands as the authoritative source on the distinction between “naked” and “nude.” Clark argues that “to be naked is to be deprived of

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<sup>1</sup> Portions of this essay are developed in a book-length study we anticipate completing in 2008. Many thanks to Albrecht Classen and to Suzanne Lewis for their insights and careful readings.

<sup>2</sup> London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.vx, commonly known as the *Beowulf* Manuscript. Elzbieta Temple, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles: Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts 900–1066* (London: Harvey Miller, 1976), 72, number 52. Temple places this manuscript in the late tenth century. However, this date remains in contention, and the body of literature on the subject is vast. See, for example, Colin Chase, *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), Kevin Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1981; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), and Audrey Meaney, “Scyld Scefing and the Dating of the *Beowulf* – Again,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 7 (1989): 7–40. Michael Lapidge has kept the debate alive by recently challenging Kiernan’s assertions in his “The Archetype of *Beowulf*,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 29 (2000): 5–41. throughout



our clothes and the word implies some embarrassment which most of us feel in that condition," whereas the exalted nude is "balanced, prosperous, and confident . . . the body re-formed."<sup>3</sup> As Benjamin Withers observes, however, this opposition between the naked and the nude develops from interpretations of Classical and Classicizing art, and has little to do with the Middle Ages, in general.<sup>4</sup> The distinction is even less suited to the *Wonders*, where we find bodies not "re-formed" but *deformed*, whether clothed or unclothed. Clark's "naked" is, in Withers' words, the "wrinkled, ugly and particular."<sup>5</sup> In Margaret Miles's similar analysis, it is the "nude" which "achieves universality at the expense of particularity," the particularity, that is, of the "naked" subject.<sup>6</sup> The figures of the *Wonders* thus further complicate such attempts at distinguishing the naked and the nude because—naked or nude—these figures are wrinkled, ugly, and *generic*. Since they each represent not an individual but a race, tribe or species, like the images of an ornithological field guide, they must by necessity be generalized images. We see not a *Blemmye* but *the Blemmye*, not a *Hostes* but *the Hostes*. As the objects of our continued gaze, each of these eastern Others is at once a body, an exposed and monstrous body, and also, like Edward Said's construct of "the Oriental," an "unchanging abstraction."<sup>7</sup>

As Withers notes, some writing about the Middle Ages has suggested that images of unclothed figures did not exist during the medieval period.<sup>8</sup> Edward Lucie-Smith, for example, informs us in *Adam: The Male Figure in Art*, "Before the Renaissance, art of the Christian era found it almost impossible to represent male genitalia."<sup>9</sup> Surely, there are many images of the unclothed male body, inclusive of genitals, before and after the Middle Ages, but there are a great many images from within that period, as well. In the introduction to this volume, Albrecht Classen comments on elisions of sexual content in editions of early modern poetry.<sup>10</sup> For the early medieval period, as Karen Rose Mathews notes with regard

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form. The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts 1953* (1956; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin C. Withers, "Forward: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England," *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), 1–14; here 4–5.

<sup>5</sup> Withers, "Uncovering the Body," 4.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Withers, "Uncovering the Body," 6.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Withers, "Uncovering the Body," 6.

<sup>10</sup> Albrecht Classen, "The Cultural Significance of Sexuality in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Beyond. A Secret Continuous Undercurrent or a Dominant Phenomenon of the Premodern World? Or: The Irrepressibility of Sex Yesterday and Today," which is the introduction to this

to unclothed figures in the Bayeux Tapestry, such images have been “ignored by most scholars, censored by others . . . the object of intense non-seeing in modern research.”<sup>11</sup> In the light of such “non-seeing in modern research,” the superabundance of unclothed, monstrous bodies that openly present themselves to us in the *Wonders of the East* becomes all the more striking: in presenting themselves to us, these figures expose not only their bodies, but also the ways in which that exposure signifies in both the early medieval context and in our own. As they confront us with the dynamics of such signification, they reflect our gaze, sometimes directly returning it, thereby showing us the limits of the very categorizing impulses by which we create, represent, and understand them, and hence, of course, by which we know ourselves.

## 2. The *Blemmye*’s Male Body

The *Blemmye* presents one of the more powerful visual challenges of the *Wonders* (Fig. 1). It is, according to the *Wonders*, a headless man who is eight feet tall and eight feet wide, with his eyes and his mouth on his chest. Beneath the figure’s right arm is a triangle, filled with wavy lines. Dana Oswald argues with respect to the representation of the exposed body in the *Wonders* that the Vitellius illustrator “addresses the problem of the naked and explicitly sexed body most often by covering it in clothing.”<sup>12</sup> Certainly the *Vitellius Blemmye* does not present us with an unambiguously naked body, yet at the same time, neither is this body unambiguously clothed. The triangular panel under the arm might suggest a garment, the folds or gatherings in a tunic, perhaps. However, nothing of the sort appears anywhere within Gale Owen-Crocker’s thoroughly illustrated account of *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, nor have we seen a similar image elsewhere in an Anglo-Saxon context.<sup>13</sup> Comparison with the strikingly similar figure of the

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volume, see § 8.

<sup>11</sup> Karen Rose Mathews, “Nudity on the Margins: The Bayeux Tapestry and its Relationship to Marginal Architectural Sculpture,” *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), 138–61; here 140. While Mathews’s statement is in large measure accurate, see Suzanne Lewis, *The Rhetoric of Power in the Bayeux Tapestry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 81 and 86–89, for a discussion of the unclothed figures in the Tapestry.

<sup>12</sup> Dana M. Oswald, “Indecent Bodies: Gender and the Monstrous in Medieval English Literature” Ph.D. thesis, Ohio State University, 2005, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Elisabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard and Kay Staniland, in *Textiles and Clothing c.1150–c.1450. Medieval Finds from Excavations in London*, 4 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK, and Rochester: NY: Boydell, 2006), 176–77, have noted that, given increasing emphasis on the fitting

*Donestre* invites association of this triangular shape with the representation of the exposed and identifiably male body (Fig. 2). The *Donestre*, like the *Blemmye*, stands with his right arm across his chest, his legs apart, and a triangle descending from his right arm. Here, however, the triangle is pointed downwards, and reveals clearly male genitalia within its outlines. The emphasis on the genitalia is underscored by further comparison with the corresponding illustration in the related Tiberius manuscript, in which the male genitalia of the figure are not only evident but also vibrantly red (Fig. 3).<sup>14</sup>

Although such panels are not referenced in studies of Anglo-Saxon dress, it is possible that the wavy lines within the triangle below the *Blemmye*'s arm may merely represent a decorative panel. As David M. Wilson has argued, Anglo-Saxon art may reveal what he calls a *horror vacui* so powerful that "when restraint leaves a surface only partially decorated the viewer can be surprised and even worried."<sup>15</sup> But the shape and location of that panel, especially given the context of the *Donestre* image, with its clearly outlined genitalia, suggest that this triangular shape *functions*, and it does so in the gendered representation of the status of the body of the *Blemmye*.

One possible function for the wavy lines of the panel is that they may represent hair, in particular the culturally significant hair of the beard. The triangle does descend from the "chin" of this headless figure and the lines are, in fact, reasonably similar to those of the Bearded Woman's beard (Fig. 4). As Gale Owen-Crocker argues, the beard as worn by the Anglo-Saxons for most of the period was probably not trimmed and rounded but long and pointed—triangular.<sup>16</sup> A traditional sign of masculinity, the image of a beard might identify this figure as male as firmly as would the exposed genitalia of the *Donestre*. Certainly, as R. D. Fulk has argued, "in Anglo-Saxon England—and indeed, in England for most of the premodern period—a man's beard was a badge of his masculinity. This is why, for instance, in the Old English laws of Alfred there are heavy fines levied for

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of garments to the body, especially in the post-Conquest period, "triangular sections cut from sleeves to fit them to the arm could easily be fitted into the lower part of a tunic to add fullness at the hem." This practice, Crowfoot et al., 177, argue, was "well developed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century." Even if we posit a similar construction represented in what might be a garment in this illustration, and hence a much earlier practice of these clothing constructions, as the illustrated pattern in *Textiles and Clothing*, figure 154, makes clear, such designs still would not result in the distinctive wavy patterns within the triangular panel in our image.

<sup>14</sup> London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.v. Temple, 104, no. 87, places this manuscript in the second quarter of the eleventh century, at Winchester.

<sup>15</sup> David M. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Art from the Seventh Century to the Norman Conquest* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1984), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, 197.

cutting off a commoner's beard."<sup>17</sup> And in Alcuin's *Disputatio with Pippin* it is the beard which is "*sexus discretio*" ("the distinction of sex").<sup>18</sup>

Although the beard functions as a sign or "badge" of sexual difference and masculinity in the Anglo-Saxon context, as in many other periods during the Middle Ages, it does not wholly displace the genitalia as sites of embodied or sexualized masculinity. For example, the figure from the *Barberini Gospels* (Vatican, MS Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican, Barb. lat 570) which Owen-Crocker reproduces for its "splendid beard," both tugs on his beard with one hand and touches his testicles with the other (Fig. 5). The twin snakes which encircle the legs and stretch their mouths toward the testicles further emphasize the (unsurprising) positioning of the genitals as the site of masculine embodiment and sexualization here supplemented by the beard as sign of masculinity.<sup>19</sup> As we move from the

<sup>17</sup> R. D. Fulk, "Male Homoeroticism in the Old English Canons of Theodore," *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder*, ed. Carol Braun Pasternack and Lisa M. C. Weston. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 277 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 1–34; here 19. In his footnote 26, Fulk provides the striking example of a twenty shilling fine for cutting off a man's beard, compared to the one-to-thirty shilling range for a blow to a man's head. Similarly, Allen J. Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 77, in his discussion of Anglo-Saxon cross-dressing saints, notes, in the case of one bearded woman saint, that the beard functions there as "both a sign of manly identity and of womanly disgrace." More generally, Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, 77, states simply, "The breast is a marker of the female, the beard of the male."

<sup>18</sup> Alcuin, "Pippini regalis et nobilissimi Juvenis disputatio cum Albino scholastico," *Patrologia Latina* vol. 101, col. 976C: "Pippin]. Quid est barba?—A[lcuin] . Sexus discretio, honor aetatis." Translation ours. Paul Edward Dutton, in *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age*. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 9, reminds us that "not just length and color, but the presentation of hair," including that of the beard and mustache, was meaningful in the Germanic world, and that it signaled tribal affiliation and rank in the early period, and difference from or affiliation with Roman and Christian cultures in the later period. In his discussion of Charlemagne's mustache in the context of the "clusters" of cultural significance surrounding it, Dutton, 26, suggests that Alcuin's identification of the beard as "a difference between the sexes" is evidence that the beard and mustache in Charlemagne's court may have been "largely decorative in effect, having no divine significance."

<sup>19</sup> Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, 198, fig. 151. One might argue further that this image draws attention to the colloquial significance of the beard pulling—an image of masturbation—thereby allowing the beard in yet another way to stand in for the genitals. Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 17–18, 108. The connection between beard-pulling and masturbation likely derives from the association of the beard with the phallus. As Jacques Marcireau wrote in his seminal study on *Le Culte du Phallus*. Collection Connaissance de l'étrange (Nice: A. Lefeuve, 1979), 122, regarding the false beard worn by the Egyptian pharaohs: "Il s'agit en réalité d'un phallus postiche en fibres tressées que le pharaon portait au menton, attaché par un cordon derrière les oreilles, quand il accomplissait certains rites."

Barberini figure to the *Blemmye*, keeping in mind the immediate context of the *Donestre* image, we are reminded that the panel on the *Blemmye* occurs *at once* below what would be his chin, and at what would be his groin.<sup>20</sup>

Given the context of the *Donestre* image, the possible sites of the *Blemmye*'s beard and genitalia similarly coincide, with the representation of the beard uncomfortably covering the genitalia. Some evidence of discomfort is perhaps visible in the image (see Fig. 1): below the triangular panel on the *Blemmye*'s body, in the rocks between the feet, is a highly suggestive shape. The shape of these rocks clearly mimics the presence of male genitalia, here actively pointing upward. If we read this figure as male, on the evidence of the "beard," these oddly formed rocks seem both a displacement of and an aggressive insistence on the retention of the *Blemmye*'s male genitalia, as they shape the very ground on which he stands.<sup>21</sup>

In her discussion of the representation and erasure of the sexualized and monstrous body in medieval literature, Dana Oswald distinguishes between three kinds of erasure: "never-drawing," "removal," and "revising."<sup>22</sup> In her own examination of the *Blemmye* figure in both the Vitellius and Tiberius manuscripts, Oswald argues for the erasure of the genitals in the Tiberius image, and contrasts the evidence of their "removal" with the "never-drawing" of the genitalia in the Vitellius:

Thus the unknown viewer, in Tiberius, removes his genitals, as he has with the other three monsters, and the artists of Vitellius and Bodley never draw him as a sexual threat at all. By removing the genitals, the viewers who perform the erasure attempt to remove the potent sexual threat of the monstrous body.<sup>23</sup>

Allowing for the possibility that the triangular panel may suggest the beard and that the "sexualized" rocks may both represent and literally point toward the displacement of the genitals enables us to consider all the more forcefully in the Vitellius image what Oswald argues more generally, that "the sexualized monster never really disappears from the text after it has been removed or erased; instead

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<sup>20</sup> This image recalls Michael Camille's discussion of a later depiction, a "gryllus here who . . . is an incarnation of scopic obsession—having a head between his legs instead of a prick. His look is an ejaculation." Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 41.

<sup>21</sup> Our thanks to Suzanne Lewis for suggesting this phrase and for shaping our emphasis here.

<sup>22</sup> Oswald, "Indecent Bodies," 41–42.

<sup>23</sup> Oswald, "Indecent Bodies," 55. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 614, a related Latin manuscript of the *Marvels of the East*, has been dated by C. M. Kauffmann, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles: Romanesque Manuscripts, 1066–1190* (London: Harvey Miller, 1975), 77, no. 38, to 1120–1140. Based on our examination of Tiberius B.v (January, 2008), we do not believe that there has been any erasure on the image, but there are many other apparent erasures in the manuscript, including some in the area of the genitals of other marvels.

the monster haunts the remainder of the text as a trace."<sup>24</sup> Here, in the figure of the *Vitellius Blemmye*, we may be able to witness erasure of the male genitalia both enacted and *represented*, as the "sexual threat" of the figure is concealed, displaced, and yet insistently present.

### 3. The *Blemmye's* Female Body

We must pause here, however, to recall that the shape of the triangular panel in our image is an *inversion* of the shape we would expect if the panel *simply* represented a beard. Inversion, at this site of embodiment and sexual difference is especially significant in an early medieval context for theorizing about such difference. Given the persistence—however contradicted in visual representation, practical medicine, and life experience—of Galenic models of sexual difference, in which the feminine is an *inversion* of the ontologically primary masculine, the literal inversion of the site of the beard/genitalia clearly suggests the possibility that we might read this figure *not* as a male, but as a male whose identifying embodied masculinity is inverted, that is, as a female. In *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, Joan Cadden writes, Galen "took great pains to demonstrate that the reproductive parts of females and males were anatomically equivalent—with the small difference that the female organs are internal—and that the anatomical equivalence necessarily implied functional equivalence."<sup>25</sup>

Essentially, this model presents women as "men turned outside in."<sup>26</sup> If we keep the prevalence of Galenic thinking in mind as we consider this image, the inversion of the beard can be partnered with the inversion of the shape outlining the genitals of the *Donestre* image, highlighted by the visual correspondence of the

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<sup>24</sup> Oswald, "Indecent Bodies," 17.

<sup>25</sup> Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*. Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 34. See too Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). Jacquart and Thomasset, 37, similarly, argue that the *Anatomia Vivarum* may be attributed to Galen, and emphasize that in this model of sexual difference the "opposition" is not of kind but of "interior-exterior." They further quote the following passage from the *Anatomia*, *ibid.*: "One can compare the relation which exists between the instrument of reproduction in the man and the instrument of reproduction in the woman to the relation which exists between the seal which leaves its imprint and the impression of the seal in the wax. The woman's instrument has an inverted structure, fixed on the inside, whereas the man's instrument has an inverted structure extending outwards." Allison P. Coudert, in her contribution to this volume, also returns to the issue at stake here, though from an early-modern perspective.

<sup>26</sup> Vern L. and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 49.

lines of the “Λ” shape on the *Blemmye* and the “V” shape on the *Donestre*. As both imply the revelation of a body beneath the clothes, the triangle marking this figure thus begins to suggest a more profound *horror vacui*: at the very sites of identifying masculinity, we confront the possibility of its absence. In the place of any unambiguous masculinity, the concealment, displacement, and inversion in this image allow for the presence, perhaps, of *female*, not male, genitalia.

In order to consider what the Anglo-Saxon illustrator and viewer might have seen in this shape, we can turn again to the Tiberius *Marvels*, the images of which may have been at least in part based upon those in Vitellius<sup>27</sup> (Fig. 6). In this more sharply outlined and better preserved illumination of the *Blemmye*, the figure is entirely and unambiguously without clothes. Secondary sexual characteristics—the broad shoulders, large, powerful hands, lack of a clear waist, and apparent ‘baldness’—all suggest, in the contemporary context, masculinity. Similarly, in the medieval context, as Isidore argues, in addition to the beard, features that exist not for utility but “to allow us to tell the difference between sexes” include “the wide chest in men; in women the smooth cheeks and the narrow chest . . . [and] wide loins and sides.”<sup>28</sup>

The absence of clothing, one might expect, could also allow for representation of genitalia. Yet what the figure includes is not the clear, vibrantly red, male genitalia of the *Tiberius Donestre*, but rather, evident and recognizable pubic hair, in place of male genitalia alone. Dana Oswald observes “something” on the groin of the Tiberius figure: “the pubic hair is clear, but a strange blotch obscures what might be a penis (82r). Even through the blotch, a viewer can vaguely see its outlines.”<sup>29</sup> Madeline Caviness, however, in her plenary lecture on “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly” at the International Congress on Medieval Studies of 2006, raises a provocative possibility. Caviness argues, regarding the Tiberius manuscript, that “an early representation of the *Blemmye*, one of the monstrous

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<sup>27</sup> Asa Simon Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England*. Studies in Medieval History and Culture (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 78.

<sup>28</sup> Isidore, *Sancti Isidori Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum libri XX*, 11.1.146, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1850), v. 82, col. 415A: “In corpore nostro quaedam tantum utilitatis causa facta sunt, ut viscera; quaedam, et utilitatis, et decoris, ut sensus in facie, et in corpore manus, ac pedes, quorum membrorum et utilitas magna est, et species decentissima. [Col.0415B] 147. Quaedam tantum decoris, ut mamillae in viris, et in utroque sexu umbilicus. Quaedam discretionis, ut in viris genitalia, barba promissa, pectus amplum; in mulieribus leves genae, et angustum pectus, ad concipiendos autem et portandos fetus renes, et latera dilatata. Quod ad hominem, et ad partes attinet corporis, ex parte dictum est, nunc aetates ejus subjungam.” Although the translation here, and below, is ours, we are indebted to the recently published translation of *The Eymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Oswald, “Indecent Bodies,” 54.

racess, horrifies the observer with a frontal view of *female* genitalia (it is presumably denial that led M. R. James to refer to this figure as male)."<sup>30</sup>

This image, if we read it following Caviness's argument, is doubly shocking. First, as Catherine Karkov writes, "the unclothed body is rare in Anglo-Saxon art in any medium, and the naked and sexed body rarer still."<sup>31</sup> The examples which do survive therefore become all the more provocative. Second, identification of the Tiberius *Blemmye* as female confounds generic expectation: the wonders, unless otherwise identified, are generally assumed to be male. Regarding Greta Austin's "Marvelous Peoples or Marvelous Races? Race and the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East*," Caviness argues that Austin "mistranslated the Latin *homo* as man instead of person, and completely overlooked the appearance of the genitals," an assertion confirmed by Mary P. Richards and Carole Hough.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, Caviness suggests that we are so accustomed to hearing that the *Blemmye* is a "headless *man*" that it is difficult to view the figure otherwise.<sup>33</sup> Even if our perception of the image is not manipulated by the text beside it in the Tiberius manuscript, we still read the images according to generic expectations,

<sup>30</sup> Madeline H. Caviness, "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly," Medieval Academy plenary, Kalamazoo 2006, 15 (emphasis added). We would like to thank Professor Caviness for generously sharing her notes from this excellent talk with us, as well as additional notes from John Fyler regarding the use of the Old English *mann*. See also Mary P. Richards, "The Body as Text in Early Anglo-Saxon Law," *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox. Medieval European Studies, 3 (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), 97–115; here 99.

<sup>31</sup> Catherine Karkov, "Exiles from the Kingdom: The Naked and the Damned in Anglo-Saxon Art," *Naked Before God*, 181–220; here 181.

<sup>32</sup> Greta Austin, "Marvelous Peoples or Marvelous Races? Race and the Anglo-Saxon Wonders of the East," *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. Timothy S. Jones, and David A. Sprunger. Studies in Medieval Culture, XLII (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 27–51, and Caviness, "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly," 15. Mary P. Richards, "The Body as Text in Early Anglo-Saxon Law," *Naked Before God*, 99, and Carole Hough, "Two Kentish Laws Concerning Women: A New Reading of Æthelbert 73 and 74," *Anglia* 119 (2001): 554–78; here 574–75, writes, "it is too well known to require demonstration here that OE *man(n)* had a much wider semantic range than its Present Day English reflex, referring to human beings of both sexes and sometimes even specifically to women." See also Christine Fell, Cecily Clark and Elizabeth Williams, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (London: British Museum, 1984), 17–18. Still, Julia Penelope Stanley and Cynthia McGowan, "Woman and Wife: Social and Semantic Shifts in English," *Papers in Linguistics* 12 (1979): 491–502, argue that at the end of the ninth century, *wif* began to mean "married woman" and, at the same time, *man* came to mean "man."

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, among many others, John Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 12, Kemp Malone, *The Nowell Codex (British Museum Cotton Vitellius A. XV, Second Manuscript)*. Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile, 12 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1963), 118, and Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 85.



expectations that might cause us to see what is not there in the image, or to fail to see what is there.

Although we cannot necessarily extend such insight into our reading of the *Wonders* in their historical context, modern studies into the interpretation of gender have shown that the presence of male genitals in an image provides certainty for viewers that a figure is male, but that visible female genitals do not provide the same certainty. Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna showed viewers intentionally ambiguous images, one bearing typically “male” characteristics but also a frontal view of visible labia, the other bearing typically “female” characteristics as well as a penis (Fig. 7). Ninety-six percent of the viewers in this study identified the figure with the penis as male, but only two-thirds of the viewers saw the figure with suggested female genitalia as female. In essence, the results of Kessler and McKenna study suggest that at least in the modern period, we are made sure of the gender of a figure when we can see a penis, but not when we can see the frontal view of female genitalia: positive presence of the penis signifies the male but positive presence of portions of the female genitalia does not signify the female.<sup>34</sup>

One significant complication in this argument, however, is that the terms of contrast are simply not equivalent. The “frontal view” of female genitalia can only be partial; it can *suggest* the presence, *just out of view*, of clitoris, labia minora, and vagina, but it cannot represent that presence directly. In contrast, the same perspective of male genitalia can represent nearly the entirety of the external organs. Few viewers, medieval or modern, presented with images of Sheela-na-gigs—with their “yawning vaginas”<sup>35</sup>—would ever identify them as male<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 8). But the images with which we are concerned here, the *Blemmye* in both the Tiberius and the Vitellius manuscripts, present us with frontal views not unlike those in the Kessler and McKenna study. Hence, the interpretation of these images must involve the relationship between genitality and other characteristics in the identification or assigning of gender; interpretation of these images also entails the images’ positioning with respect to the viewer, positioning which, as it places most

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<sup>34</sup> Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, “Toward a Theory of Gender,” *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (London: Routledge, 2006), 165–82; here 170–72. The editorial introduction to this article notes, 165, that it was a “landmark contribution to the study of gender,” showing “gender, like reality itself, to be ‘socially constructed;’ it is produced through interactions with others rather than being a ‘natural’ quality of the material body.”

<sup>35</sup> Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 155.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Freitag, *Sheela-na-gigs: Unravelling an Enigma* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 13–15, summarizes scholarship on dating these figures, including arguments that they can be dated as early as the eleventh century. Classen, “The Cultural Significance of Sexuality,” § 5, discusses the potential semantic range of these figures.

of the female genitalia out of view, allows for positive genital identification of the image as not-male, but *also* as possibly, but not unambiguously female.

Does this examination of the Tiberius image help us to understand the curious shape between the legs of the *Vitellius Blemmye* (see Fig. 1)? Perhaps. If the triangular panel we have been examining is indeed intended to represent hair, then given its location, it might represent the masculine beard. The inversion of the triangle, and its displacement of the male genitalia also suggest that it might, predicting Caviness's reading of the Tiberius image, denote the female pubic triangle, though also curiously inverted. Similar representations occur in other Anglo-Saxon contexts, as in the Junius 11 Genesis illustrations, where Eve's pubic triangle is distinctly outlined (Fig. 9). Mathews has argued that

[i]n the Middle Ages, nudity presented negative associations, and it is in these types of representations that we most often see the display of female breasts and male and female genitalia. These are sexualized bodies, defined by sin and excess . . . [not only in the case of Eve but also] in an overwhelming majority of non-religious images, as well.<sup>37</sup>

If we read in this figure not only the absence of the penis but also the suggestion of female genitals, this image thus amplifies the generally frightening, dangerous context of the *Wonders*. Here, the monstrous body thus becomes all the more potentially dangerous because it is associated with, though not identifiable simply as, the female body. But the danger in the association of the *Blemmye* with the female body is not only the danger *of* the monster, but also danger *to* it. Returning to the rock formation at the *Vitellius Blemmye's* feet (see Fig. 1), especially if we read the figure as female, the formation may seem, rising between her legs, as a sexual threat not unlike that presented by the *Donestre* toward his female victim. That is, as even the landscape of this manuscript can be sexualized and perhaps appear as threatening, this figure is both dangerous and *vulnerable*.<sup>38</sup> Read in connection with either a male or female figure, the budding trefoil rock seems to point, literally, to the absent presence of the *Blemmye's* sex as well as to potential dangers in the identification of that sex as male *or* female.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Karen Rose Mathews, "Nudity on the Margins: The Bayeux Tapestry and Its Relationship to Marginal Architectural Sculpture," 139. Mathews cites Michael Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 86–90. Mathews is primarily discussing an early medieval context. In the later Middle Ages, as Classen, "The Cultural Significance of Sexuality," esp. § 9, notes, sexuality and nudity could have positive valence. Indeed, as Classen writes, 52, "the continued tradition of highly erotic literature even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries speaks a different language" (57–58).

<sup>38</sup> In contrast with the *Donestre's* anatomy, this rock seems small and flaccid. If it points to masculine sexuality, in doing so it emphasizes the failure or impotence of that sexuality.

<sup>39</sup> We might connect this sign standing in for male genitalia with the staffs and slings born by the masculine women of the *Libra de bu Amor*. See Connie L. Scarborough's essay in this volume on

#### 4. The *Blemmye's* Compacted Body: Doublings and Omissions

The *Blemmye*, unlike many of the creatures in the *Wonders*, is not a hybrid creature. It is not part bird, part sheep, or part woman, part ox. Rather, the *Blemmye* is categorized as a wonder because of its lack, the lack of a head, and the concomitant and strange compacting of its body to include organs and features of the head within the body. In the representation of this compacting, the head is clearly missing in a literal sense, and yet in another, is not missing at all, given the clear features, including those unmentioned by the text (the ears, nose, and eyebrows). The head remains so clearly present that it presents itself, and the body of the image *becomes* a kind of head.<sup>40</sup> In his discussion of the related concept of the face, James Elkins notes that “in the ordinary ways of speaking a face is something that has eyes, a mouth, and some other orifices *and sits atop a body*.”<sup>41</sup> Certainly, we could define the head in very similar terms, and indeed, it is just this final qualification that is at issue, since the *Blemmye's* “head” is very much in evidence in all but its proper location.

As we have focused on the representation of the marks of sexual identification, we have been exploring some of the implications of this compacting of the *Blemmye's* body: as head and body coexist in space, so too for the *Blemmye* do primary and secondary sexual characteristics, as well as the presence and absence of male and female genitalia. We have been largely examining the image, but the text which partners the image of the *Blemmye* in the Vitellius manuscript similarly suggests an anxiety focused on the identification of the sex of the creature. Where Tiberius provides both the Latin “homo” and the Old English “mann,” and hence the potential to narrow our translation, however problematically, from “person” to “man,” Vitellius, to our increasing unease, omits the noun entirely: the manuscript reads “Þonne syndon opere ealond suð from b[r]ixon[te/ on þon beoð [ ] buton/ heafdū . . .” (“Then are other islands south from the Brixontes on which are [ ] without heads.”)<sup>42</sup>

The omission of “mann” clearly suggests scribal error, but one might also argue that because this “error” occurs at a site of considerable anxiety, we cannot dismiss it as “simply” an error. Rather, the textual omission here works in concert with the image’s insistent worrying at the representation of sexual difference: such concern may be extended, albeit speculatively, from anxiety about the representation of

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“The Rape of Men and other ‘Lessons’ about Sex in the *Libra de bu Amor*.”

<sup>40</sup> Susan M. Kim, “The Donestre and the Person of Both Sexes,” *Naked Before God*, 162–80; here 177.

<sup>41</sup> James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (New York: Harcourt, 1996), 13 (emphasis added).

<sup>42</sup> *Wonders*, 5R. Note that here “[ ]” serves to indicate a site in the text that has been identified in other editions as an omission.

sexual difference alone to anxiety underlying the very categorizing impulses that motivate the genre of the *Wonders*.

The manuscript overcompensates for the text's omission by means of a bit of visual doubling. The *Blemmye*'s dually resonant triangular panel—its conflation of (inverted) beard and pubic triangle—further troubles the interpretation of this image because in its conflation of the beard and the pubic triangle, this image reminds us that the pubic triangle, like the beard, can indicate gender, but is not genitalia: although the pubic triangle may function to *signify* female genitalia, the pubic triangle neither equals nor guarantees the positive presence of female genitalia. That medieval artists and audiences understood the *difference* between pubic hair and genitalia becomes perhaps most dramatically apparent in sculpture, in the graphic depictions of female genitalia which characterize the sheela-na-gigs, the most famous of which is on a mid-twelfth-century corbel from the church of Kilpeck in Herefordshire (see Fig. 8). Here, we find the wide-eyed sheela-na-gig with a “smirking mouth” and “enormously exaggerated,” grotesquely distended vulva, spread wide.<sup>43</sup> But medieval knowledge of that difference is also explicit in the physiological descriptions in texts such as the *Etymologies*, in which Isidore explains,

‘Genitalia’ are the parts of the body (as the name itself indicates) that have taken their name from the begetting of offspring, because with them one procreates and gives birth. And ‘pudenda’ for feelings of shame, or else ‘pubis,’ for being hidden by a garment. And moreover, they are called ‘inhonestus,’ because they do not have the same kind of beauty as the limbs, which are placed in view.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Barbara Freitag, *Sheela-na-gigs: Unravelling an Enigma*, 151. For commentary on this and other Sheela-na-gig figures, see Jørgen Andersen, *The Witch on the Wall: Medieval Erotic Sculpture in the British Isles* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1977), Marian Bleeke, “Sheelas, Sex, and Significance in Romanesque Sculpture: The Kilpeck Corbel Series,” *Studies in Iconography* 26 (2005): 1–26; Jennifer Regan Borland, “Unstable Women: Transgression and Corporeal Experience in Twelfth-Century Visual Culture,” Ph.D thesis, Stanford University, 2006, Maureen Concannon, *The Sacred Whore: Sheela, Goddess of the Celts* (Wilton, Ireland: Collins Press, 2004), Catherine E. Karkov, “Sheela-Na-Gigs and Other Unruly Women: Images of Land and Gender in Medieval Ireland,” *From Ireland Coming: Irish Art from the Early Christian to the Late Gothic Period and Its European Context*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Index of Christian Art and Department of Art and Archaeology, in association with Princeton University Press, 2001), 313–31. For many images of Sheela-na-gigs, see Gabriel Cannon, “Ireland’s Sheela-na-gig,” <http://www.irelands-sheelanagigs.org/>, and Anthony Weir, “Satan in the Groin,” <http://www.beyond-the-pale.org.uk> (both last accessed on March 31, 2008)

<sup>44</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, 11.1.102, PL vol. 82, col. 409D–410A: “Genitalia corporis partes (ut nomen ipsum docet), gignendae sobolis acceperunt vocabulum, quod his procreatur et gignitur. Haec et pudenda pro verecundia, sive a pube, unde et indumento operiuntur. Dicuntur autem ista et inhonestas, quia non habent eam speciem decoris, sicut membra, quae in promptu locata sunt.” Translation ours.

The genitalia are “covered” or “hidden” (“operiuntur”) by pubic hair (“pubis”): hence, in this image, if we read the striated triangle as both beard and pubic triangle, gender characteristics are both represented and *inverted*, both signified and *concealed*.

The paradoxical signifying and concealment of the possibility for identification of the figure as female is emphasized even further by the imposition not only of beard over genitalia, but also of the face over the breast. The text reads, “Þa habbað on hyra breostum/heora eagan 7 muð” (“which have on their breasts their eyes and mouth”).<sup>45</sup> Here the plural “breostum,” in Old English as in present day English means “chest” (and is “pecore” in the Latin of the *Tiberius Wonders*) but also “breasts.” As the Old English *Life of Eugenia* suggests, for example, women can be identified as women in the Anglo-Saxon literary context not by their genitalia, but by their breasts.<sup>46</sup> Two images of the climactic scene are currently known, a capital at Vézelay from about 1120 and a thirteenth-century Spanish antependium by the Master of Soriguera.<sup>47</sup> In the latter, the climactic scene is most fascinating: “Pictorial representations of the trial of Eugenia highlight the gender confusion that characterizes her *vita*.”<sup>48</sup> We see Eugenia, with a shaved tonsure and halo, pulling her monastic robes open to reveal her breasts (Fig. 10). This is the moment of recognition of her female status. As Kirk Ambrose writes, “the saint’s tonsure and female body signify alternatively the masculine and feminine, thereby emphasizing the gender confusion recorded in written versions of the story.”<sup>49</sup> Although the breasts in the image are curiously narrow, curving tubes, these breasts, rather than her genitalia, serve to identify Eugenia as a woman. One aspect of the *Blemmye’s* monstrosity thus may be the fact that the face (or the eyes and mouth, at any rate), that marker of personal identity, covers or displaces the breasts, those potential markers of female identity.

The simultaneous display and concealment of markers of gender in the context of Isidore’s *Etymologies* suggests no superficial troubling of the category of gender,

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<sup>45</sup> *Wonders*, 5R, 2–3

<sup>46</sup> The cross-dressed Eugenia, charged with adultery with another woman, reveals her breast, a gesture which enables her to be recognized by her father and which unambiguously restores her identity as virtuous woman rather than transgressive man. In the OE: “Æfter Þyssum wordum heo to-tær hyre gewædu/ and æt-æwde hyre breost . . . Ða oncnæow phillippus swa swa fæder eugenian . . .” (“Natale Sancte Eugenie Uirginis,” *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, EETS os, 76, 82, 94, 124 (London: N. Trübner for EETS, 1881; London: Oxford University Press, 1996), 38–40. Frantzen, *Before the Closet*, 77, argues, “The breast is a crucial and concealed marker of womanly identity in the life of Eugenia.”

<sup>47</sup> Both images are discussed by Kirk Ambrose, “Two Cases of Female Cross-Undressing in Medieval Art and Literature,” *Source* 23, 3 (Spring, 2004): 7–14.

<sup>87</sup> Ambrose, “Two Cases of Female Cross-Undressing,” 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ambrose, “Two Cases of Female Cross-Undressing,” 8.

but a challenge to the fundamental understanding of both the human body and the human subject. Isidore explains that the parts of the body are created for three reasons: function, ornament, and sexual distinction. That is, he argues that the viscera, for example, are created for usefulness; the navel is created for ornament; the hands and feet are created for both usefulness and ornament. But “the genitals, the full beard, and the broad chest in men and the smooth cheeks and the narrow chest in women” were created neither for usefulness nor for ornament, but rather “for the sake of difference.”<sup>50</sup> Primary and secondary sex distinctions in this model are not a consequence or a reflection of the body’s functions: on the contrary, the signification of sexual difference is one of the motivations for the creation of the form of the body. The body is created in this model to *enable* us to read it as male or female.

We might thus argue that the body of the *Blemmye*, with its facial features concealing the breasts, its suggested yet elided genitals, its inverted image of the beard and pubic triangle, disables any reading of sexual distinction. Dorothy Yamamoto, writing about the *Bestiary*—“a key text for exploring how the relations between humans and animals were construed”<sup>51</sup>—argues that, within the context of medieval culture, the distinction between man and beast is not as clear as we might hope:

[T]here are complications, and these spring from the invocation of the body as a guarantor of identity. For, as Foucault and many others have shown, the body is perpetually the site of tensions, of competing discourses . . . potentially aberrant, rebellious . . . and as such partakes of a dangerous liability. If men stand upright and beasts crawl on all fours, what are we to make of a man who copies a beast's posture? If he starts to live like an animal, does he forfeit his humanity?<sup>52</sup>

We might consider Yamamoto’s invocation of the concept of liability in regard to the *Blemmye*, as well. Hence, we might also rephrase: much as many of the wonders call into question the legibility of the boundaries dividing humanity from its Others, the body of the *Blemmye* does not simply disable us, as readers, from identifying it as male or female; it also represents its disabling power *as* an obscuring of the legibility of sexual distinction.

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<sup>50</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, XI.1.146: “In corpore nostro quaedam tantum utilitatis causa facta sunt, ut viscera; quaedam, et utilitatis, et decoris, ut sensus in facie, et in corpore manus, ac pedes, quorum membrorum et utilitas magna est, et species decentissima. Quaedam tantum decoris, ut mamillae in viris, et in utroque sexu umbilicus. Quaedam discretionis, ut in viris genitalia, barba promissa, pectus amplum; in mulieribus leves genae, et angustum pectus, ad concipiendos autem et portandos fetus renes, et latera dilatata.”

<sup>51</sup> Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>52</sup> Yamamoto, *Boundaries of the Human*, 8.

## 5. The *Blemmye's* Monstrous Gaze

In our opening distinction between the naked and the nude, we noted Margaret Miles's argument that, for Clark, "the nude achieves universality at the expense of particularity." Miles continues, "The subject of a nude painting has been deleted, replaced by the role the nude plays in representing 'a far wider and more civilizing experience.'"<sup>53</sup> In Miles's formulation we can begin to account for the Vitellius *Blemmye's* knot of representations—of obfuscations, omissions, displacements, inversions, and concealments—because, for Miles, that deleted subject is a *female* subject. As Miles argues, the naked "shapeless, pitiful model" which Clark sees transformed into the nude of the artist's rendering is evident both in the fact that Clark focuses on female nudes, and also in the association of the grotesque body (against which the "civilizing" nude is erected) with the female body.<sup>54</sup> As Albrecht Classen notes in his Introduction to this volume, the condemnation of women's bodies can be traced to the Church Fathers.<sup>55</sup> Miles further maintains:

Because of woman's affiliation with the quintessentially grotesque events of birth, sexual intercourse, and death, from the collective male perspective of the public sphere the most concentrated sense of the grotesque comes, not from exotic but distant monsters, but from the figure "woman."<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, Dyan Elliot has argued that it is less in the literature of the monstrous than in the quotidian and pervasive taboos surrounding the female body—most clearly menstruation—that we can see evidenced "humanity's doomed battle against the powers of defilement."<sup>57</sup> In the attempted "civilizing," distancing from the naked female body in the representation of the nude, the representation must at once identify the body, and identify it as female, and put that which *makes* it female out of view—its particularity, its nakedness, and the subjectivity with which it is coterminus.

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<sup>32</sup> Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 14.

<sup>54</sup> "The illustrations in the 1959 publication of *The Naked and the Nude* reveal the gender assumptions in Clark's argument. All the illustrations that appear on the pages from which I have quoted are of nude females. The 'shapeless, pitiful model' from which art is created, then appears to be female." Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Classen, "The Cultural Significance of Sexuality," § 1. Classen here cites Paula M. Rieder, *On the Purification of Women: Churching in Northern France, 1100–2600*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 21.

<sup>65</sup> Miles, *Carnal Knowing*, 147.

<sup>57</sup> Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 2.

In her prefatory examination of an exhibition of Thomas Eakins's nudes, Susan Stewart discusses the nineteenth-century practice of blindfolding unclothed women models. Stewart focuses on *Nude Woman Seated Wearing a Mask* (Fig. 11). She writes, "Abstract, massive, characterized, as [Lloyd] Goodrich notes, by plays of light and shadow and, at the same time, tremendous weight, this work nevertheless compels us to look at that bandage or obstruction that is precisely the site of nonlooking: the blindfold."<sup>58</sup> Stewart continues,

This problem—the impossibility of a seeing that could see itself seeing, and consequently of a writing that could write itself writing—appears at the limit of representation; it is the limit that defines the very possibility of representation, the blank or blinded time/space that enables all representation to take time and space.<sup>59</sup>

The Eakins image is so deeply troubling in part because while it does not confront the viewer with the subject looking back, it requires the viewer to recognize the violence it commits in blinding that subject. In this work, painted within two years of Edouard Manet's famous (in its own time, infamous) *Olympia*, we can see the power of the abridgement of the gaze, particularly the masculine gaze directed at a female sitter. *Olympia* was scandalous for the frank, open, sexual challenge it presented to the male viewer, used to safe anonymity. We might be tempted to read Eakins's image as a reaction to this confrontational female gaze, an overzealous attempt at recontainment; we might also consider the possibility that the image, by forcing us to look at the site of its blinding of the subject, particularly in the context of *Olympia*, potentially challenges the conventions of representation with even greater power. This image highlights the role of the returned gaze, through its thorough and forceful denial.

The *Wonders* might be considered a static spectacle, through which the viewer asserts his difference from the image, and the power of his gaze. The figure of the *Blemmye*, however, actively challenges any reading of the viewer's unidirectional gaze. If the compacting of the *Blemmye's* body, focusing on the imposition of the *Blemmye's* face over the breasts, renders the body monstrous, the same imposition transforms the body into the locus of the subject. The *Blemmye's* body is his/her face, and the eyes through which he or she gazes out. For Elkins, in his sweeping study of the nature of seeing, the "face, in the end, is the place where the coherent mind becomes an image."<sup>60</sup> That is to say, the image of the face embodies the coalescence of the "coherent mind" of its subject. In the case of the *Blemmye*, while

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<sup>58</sup> Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), vii. Stewart here refers to Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, for the National Gallery of Art, 1982), 10–11.

<sup>59</sup> *Crimes of Writing*, vii–viii.

<sup>60</sup> Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*, 200.



the face's displacement of the markers of gender renders the body monstrous, the same displacement also imposes the legible subjectivity of a "coherent mind" on the image. As Margaret Olin writes, "if you can look back, you cannot be possessed by the gaze of the other."<sup>61</sup> The insistent subjectivity—the "coherent mind"—conveyed by the *Blemmye's* embodied outward gaze resists the viewer's power to read the image as an object, as *only* a body, and thus blind it, to deny the possibility of subjectivity for the *Blemmye* and thus the reciprocity of the process of viewing as it is represented in the *Wonders*.<sup>62</sup>

The confrontational stare of the *Blemmye*, so directly addressed toward the viewer, creates a relationship that is reciprocal rather than unidirectional. Stewart's reading of the Eakins nude is very much in line with the phenomenological writing of Vivian Sobchack, first applied to Anglo-Saxon art by Suzanne Lewis.<sup>63</sup> Although Sobchack deals with the ramifications of spectatorship in regard to film, many of her insights, paired with Stewart's, shed further light on our troubled interaction with the *Blemmye*. Our engagement with this being is, as Sobchack writes (about film),

direct engagement . . . [not] a monologic one between a viewing subject and a viewed object. Rather, it is a dialogical and dialectical engagement of *two* viewing subjects who also exist as visible objects . . . Both . . . are capable of viewing and of being viewed, both are embodied in the world as the subject of vision and object for vision.<sup>64</sup>

Sobchack is arguing that film makes us especially aware of our own spectatorship. If we accept that film, with its eye-like camera, can see, we can also argue that film itself becomes in a sense a subject, and that its "seeing" transforms the viewer from the sole possessor of the gaze into the object of another's gaze. Confronting the

<sup>61</sup> Margaret Olin, "Gaze," *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 217.

<sup>62</sup> Issues of the power of the monstrous gaze are at play in the figure of Medusa. Albrecht Classen, "Medusa, Pegasus und Perseus: Antiker Mythos, mittelalterliche Rezeption und Nachleben in der Neuzeit," *Dämonen, Monster, Fabelwesen. Mittelalter Mythen 2*, eds. Werner Wunderlich and Ulrich Müller (St. Gallen: UVK-Fachverlag für Wissenschaft und Studium, 1999), 403–12, discusses the continued use of the trope of the power of the gaze of Medusa from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Age, and into the modern world. This monstrous female figure undergoes a series of changes throughout the period such that, as Classen notes, 407, "Unterschiede zum antiken Medusa-Mythos sind unverkennbar, ebenso aber auch die Gemeinsamkeiten. Das Monster töteten nicht selbst durch seine Blicke, sondern benutzt ein Medusen-Haupt. In der griechischen Sage erstarbten die Opfer zu Stein, während sie hier umgebracht und dann ausgesaugt werden."

<sup>63</sup> Suzanne Lewis, "Medieval Bodies Then and Now: Negotiating Problems of Ambivalence and Paradox," *Naked Before God*, 15–28; here 18–19, strongly argues for the applicability of Sobchack's phenomenological approach to Anglo-Saxon images.

<sup>64</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 23.

*Blemmye* does something similar. Moving from folio to folio in the manuscript, we might imagine that we can remain an unseen eye, an invisible, consciousness that can observe without risk. The *Wonders of the East* seem, at first, like Edward Said's Orient:

*watched*, since its almost (but never quite) offensive behavior issues out of a reservoir of infinite peculiarity; the European, whose sensibility tours the Orient, is a watcher, never involved, always detached, always ready for new examples of what the *Description de l'Égypte* called "bizarre jouissance." The Orient becomes a living tableau of queerness.<sup>65</sup>

However, when we turn the fifth folio of the *Wonders*, exposing the *Blemmye*, we expose ourselves as well. Through its gaze, or its return of our gaze, the headless *Blemmye* suddenly reminds us of our own spectatorship. As Mary Blaine Campbell has argued with respect to a figure of the Cyclops in a late sixteenth-century costume book, the gaze of this figure, directly into the eye of the viewer, "is nonetheless the Eye, writ large, that we ourselves have been reduced to."<sup>66</sup> In at once asserting subjectivity with respect to the gaze and reflecting our own gaze back to us, this difficult image, which makes us sweat over its ambiguity, robs us of the power of the unseen eye. The *Blemmye* breaks from the stasis of spectacle as it jolts the viewer back into our present time and place by forcing us to recognize our own spectation. But the *Blemmye* stares back at us with the very opposite of the disembodied gaze of the spectator: its literally embodied gaze, staring back at us thus reminds us that, like its literally embodied eyes, our own gaze is neither transcendent nor omniscient, but rather singular and *embodied*. The *Blemmye's* gaze thus has the effect of embodying us, of thrusting us, the viewers, back into our bodies.

Our viewing pleasure is facilitated, also in filmic terms, through a process referred to as the "suture." Kaja Silverman describes suture as a "sleight-of-hand," which "involves attributing to a character within the fiction qualities which in fact belong to the machinery of enunciation," particularly "the ability to generate narrative, the omnipotent and coercive gaze."<sup>67</sup> Suture, then, is a complex of techniques that essentially allow viewers to forget that they are watching a film (or reading a manuscript) and instead become lost within the narrative unfolding

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<sup>65</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 103.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Blaine Campbell, "The Nude Cyclops in the Costume Book," *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles*, 285–301; here 299.

<sup>67</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 232. As Silverman, 195, notes, the concept of suture was originated by Jacques-Alain Miller, and has been expanded by a number of authors.

before them. Suture seems a pointedly appropriate term for this context, in which many of the beings seem to be stitched together from disparate creatures.

As Olin notes, however, "suture can be broken if one of the characters acknowledges the camera, thus making the audience aware of the implications of their own gaze."<sup>68</sup> The *Blemmye* seems not as if viewed through a lens or trapped behind a screen, but rather, as if present within our space, painted as he is on the fleshly surface of the leaf. There is, of course, no camera, so the *Blemmye's* gaze seems to address us directly, without mediation. As it does so, it collapses the space between the viewed viewer and the viewed/viewing *Blemmye* in the manner of *peregrinatio in stabilitate*,<sup>69</sup> and thus the reciprocal nature of the gazes at play in this image imply that we are both "*viewing subjects* materially and consciously inhabiting, signifying, and sharing a world."<sup>70</sup> In Sobchack's words, "this act of viewing, this '*address of the eye*,' implicates both *embodied, situated* existence and a *material* world; for to see and be seen, the viewing subject must be a body and be materially in the world, sharing a similar manner and matter of existence with other viewing subjects."<sup>71</sup> That the image looking back, in this case, the *Blemmye*, with its shockingly embodied gaze is *literally* monstrous strongly emphasizes the challenge that the representation of the reciprocal gaze presents to the viewer.

What is the problem with being made aware of our own spectatorship in this fashion? First, as Olin argues: "The direct address of the spectator . . . draws his attention to the voyeuristic quality of his gaze . . . [in order] to awaken in the . . . voyeur . . . the shame that comes from discovering that someone is watching him."<sup>72</sup> Second, and more vitally, the *Blemmye's* fixed gaze carries a very tangible threat, at least for the medieval reader/viewer. As Elkins writes, "Ultimately, seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is

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<sup>68</sup> Olin, "Gaze," 213.

<sup>69</sup> Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, 31.

<sup>70</sup> Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 24.

<sup>71</sup> Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 23. Sobchack is here relying heavily on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who notes similarly: "As soon as we see other seers . . . henceforth, through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible . . . In being realized, they therefore bring out the limits of our factual vision, they betray the solipsist illusion that consists in thinking that every going beyond is a surpassing accomplished by oneself. For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, followed by working notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 143. A portion of this quotation is used as the epigraph to Sobchack's book.

<sup>72</sup> Olin, "Gaze," 212.

metamorphosis, not mechanism."<sup>73</sup> This threat, as bodily as it is psychological, will be discussed at length below.

As we have argued, in the representation of the nude, the "civilizing" distancing from the naked, grotesque, and *female* body must simultaneously represent an identifiable body, and elide exactly that which makes that body what it is.<sup>74</sup> Hence, we argue that as a nude, the representation of the *Blemmye* is insistent in its reference to the marks of sexual difference—the pubic triangle, the beard, those markers which should denote the status of this creature as male or female. Yet at the same time the *Blemmye* overturns, inverts, superimposes, and conceals those potential markers of difference. Given the manuscript context of other images, such as that of the *Donestre* (see Fig. 2), which make the gender of the figures represented absolutely clear, we cannot dismiss the lack of clarity in the representation of gender as a result of artistic ineptitude. Instead, we argue that the *Blemmye*, in its surplus of signs and elisions, like the blindfolded Eakins nude, forces our attention away from the legible body of the nude and to the site of the limits of representation: in the Eakins drawing, the blindfold; in the *Wonders* illustration, the dislocated but firmly fixed gaze of the *Blemmye*.

The eyes of the *Blemmye*, as we have noted, occur on the chest, displacing what might be male nipples or female breasts. We have emphasized the role of the breast as a mark of gender in the Anglo-Saxon context. The superimposition of the eyes upon the breast thus may suggest the association of the *viewing* eye not exclusively with the male subject, but also with the gendered—even female—body associated with that subject.<sup>75</sup> This association of the viewing eye with the gendered body, and the anxiety that such association carries, is represented perhaps most clearly for the modern context in the controversial *Le Viol* (*The Rape*), "one of Magritte's most shocking images of the female body,"<sup>76</sup> (Fig. 12) in which René Magritte presents an image provocatively congruent with that of the *Blemmye*. Here, a woman's torso is superimposed over her face so that, in a sort of inversion of the *Blemmye* image, "the breasts are substituted for eyes, the navel for

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<sup>73</sup> Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*, 11–12.

<sup>74</sup> "It turns out that 'nakedness' requires for its full effect not only a body unclothed but also a body with which one can identify one's own." Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, 293.

<sup>75</sup> Elkins notes in *The Object Stares Back*, "what sees is the mind, the person connected to the eye, but the eye itself is just tissue—it would be like looking at someone's palm or at a nipple." *The Object Stares Back*, 48.

<sup>76</sup> Robin Adèle Greeley, "Image, Text and the Female Body: René Magritte and the Surrealist Publications," *Oxford Art Journal*, 15, 2 (1992): 48–57; here 48. Greeley provides a useful summary of a commentary on Susan Gubar's article: Susan Gubar, "Representing Pornography: Feminism, Criticism, and Depictions of Female Violation," *Critical Inquiry* 13, 4 (Summer 1987): 712–41. It is worth noting Magritte's frequent use of images of women with their heads shrouded in fabric, recalling Eakins's model.

the nose, and perhaps a risqué pun on the word 'labia' is intended. This monstrous image is both funny and grotesque."<sup>77</sup> At her chin, which is also her groin, is a clearly delineated pubic triangle filled with hair. In this case, the female genitals are again implied rather than shown, but are also associated with the mouth.

As Susan Gubar notes, Magritte is central to discussions of images of "women fragmented into body parts," although in both *The Rape* and the *Vitellius Blemmye*, the fragmented parts have been reassembled into disconcerting wholes that refuse to resolve cleanly into fixed images.<sup>78</sup> As Robin Adèle Greeley writes, "Magritte indicates for visual representation what Lacan stresses about language as a whole—that it exists primarily not as a mode of unification, of smoothing, of coherent expression: but, rather, as the place where the subject is constituted as divided."<sup>79</sup> That is, since for Lacan the very means by which the subject is constituted also divides that subject, in the Magritte painting, clearly, almost literally, the very resolution of the image into a coherent representation is dependent on a simultaneous turn away from the fragmented body by which it is constituted. These images literalize the very process of representation by drawing the viewer's attention to the limits thereof. By so doing, they force a focus on the mechanisms of their own representation, rather than allowing the process of representation to fade into the background. By refusing this transparency, they at once allow for the creation of a fiction of coherence (the resolution, for example, of the body into the face in *Le Viol*) and the constitution of that coherence as a fiction which denies the fragmentation of the body which makes it possible.

As we have observed, the overly present yet missing heads of *Le Viol* and the *Blemmye*—both of which have been "simultaneously decapitated and recapitated"—are the inverse of one another.<sup>80</sup> In Gubar's words, *Le Viol* is "endowed with blind nipples replacing eyes, a belly button where her nose should be, and a vulva for a mouth, [so that] the female face is erased by the female torso imposed on it."<sup>81</sup> Inversely, the *Blemmye* presents an image in which the *potentially* female torso—most particularly the gender-marking breasts—are overwritten by the face. And indeed, this genderless face renders the gender of the body considerably less legible. For Gubar, the torso-face of *Le Viol* is doubly monstrous, as "monstrously impenetrable," but also, as it "turns the female into a bearded

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<sup>77</sup> Randa Dubnick, "Visible Poetry: Metaphor and Metonymy in the Paintings of René Magritte," *Contemporary Literature*, 21, 3 (Summer, 1980): 407–19; here 417.

<sup>78</sup> Susan Gubar, "Representing Pornography," 715.

<sup>79</sup> Greeley, "Image, Text and the Female Body," 55.

<sup>80</sup> Gubar, "Representing Pornography," 722.

<sup>81</sup> Gubar, "Representing Pornography," 722.

lady," bending the apparent gender clarity.<sup>82</sup> Just as the panel between the *Blemmye*'s legs defies a certain reading, so too, "the way the pubic hair functions like a mustache or beard" in *Le Viol* creates an "almost hermaphroditic iconography."<sup>83</sup>

While such superimposition might be read as an aspect of the monstrous violations of boundaries of category which are generic here, it also can be approached as the representation of an extremely provocative *continuity*: the *Blemmye*'s shockingly reciprocal gaze echoes graphic representations of female genitality elsewhere in the Middle Ages. Among images, the sheela-na-gigs most vividly present not only exaggerated, exposed female genitalia, but also open mouths and direct and wide-open eyes, the shape of which is often nearly identical to that of the genital opening. And not all of these figures are as cheery as that from Kilpeck. As Jennifer Borland writes, they are "frequently represented with coarsely-rendered breasts and scarred or emaciated bodies," such as the Irish Sheela-na-gigs at Tullaroan, County Kilkenny, and Fethard, County Tipperary (Fig. 13).<sup>84</sup>

The literary context also plays with these resonances. In Old English, "eage" means not only "eye" in the sense of the organ of sight, but also "eye" in the sense of "hook and eye," that is, "hole," or "aperture." *Exeter Book* Riddle 25, the "Onion" riddle, famously puns on the double meanings, hinting at female sexual lubrication while portraying the eating of an onion: "FeleÐ sona/ mines gemotes, seo Ðe mec nearwað,/ wif wundenlocc. Wæt bið Ðæt eage" ("She who confines me, woman with curly hair, feels my company at once. That eye will be wet").<sup>85</sup>

These contexts remind us that the text beside the *Blemmye* image explains not that these creatures have their *faces* on their chests, as might be expected given the ears, nose, and even eyebrows on the image, but that they "habbað/ on hyra breostum/ heora eagan 7 muð" ("have on their breasts their eyes and mouth"). As Elkins notes, the face is usually divined by openings, by "eyes, a mouth, and some other orifices,"<sup>86</sup> and the text emphasizes that it is the openings, the eyes and the mouth, not the surfaces of the face, that are on the *Blemmye*'s breasts. Hence, given the contexts we have just described, the eyes, as not surfaces but openings in this image not only displace the breasts as marks of female gender but also metonymically *represent* female genitalia.

<sup>82</sup> Gubar, "Representing Pornography," 722.

<sup>83</sup> Gubar, "Representing Pornography," 732.

<sup>84</sup> Jennifer Regan Borland, "Unstable Women," 5. For an image of the Sheela from Tullaroan, see Freitag, *Sheela-na-gigs*, plate 8.

<sup>85</sup> *The Exeter Book*, ed. George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie. The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition, III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 193.

<sup>86</sup> Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*, 13.

In his study of the later Middle Ages, Michael Camille argues that “Gothic art is best understood, not through the abstract eye of the engineer or the text-bound gaze of the iconographer, but rather through the eye as the medievals understood it—a powerful sense-organ of perception, knowledge, and pleasure.”<sup>87</sup> The image of the *Blemmye* powerfully suggests that the eye as the *early* medieval, Anglo-Saxon readers/viewers of this text understood it may have been dramatically different from the eye as most contemporary scholars understand it. Indeed, as Cynthia Hahn observes, the early Middle Ages held different ideas about vision than the more often discussed later Middle Ages. In the earlier period, discussion of vision “focused on an instantaneous and powerful effect, which struck or engraved the heart,” as discussed by Gregory the Great.<sup>88</sup> Yet much of medieval vision theory, Gregory included, was rooted in Augustine, who popularized the notion of extramission, in which “the eye emits a visual ray. This ray, strengthened by the presence of light, goes out to encounter its visual object, is shaped by that object, and finally returns to the eye.”<sup>89</sup>

According to the twelfth-century theologian William of Conches, “the ray issuing forth from a man carries his qualities,” and so “a diseased eye can infect the eye of its beholder.”<sup>90</sup> This concept of extramission and the effect of the return of the ray, too, is rooted in Augustine, who “believed that a pregnant woman could effect the form of her fetus through looking.”<sup>91</sup> Augustine writes in *De trinitate* that, as opposed to those of chameleons (“whose bodies vary with ready change, according to the colors which it sees”)

in the case of other animals, since their grossness of flesh does not easily admit change, the offspring, for the most part, betray the particular fancies of the mothers, whatever it is that they have beheld with special delight.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Michael Camille, *Gothic Art* (London: Calmann and King, 1996), 11.

<sup>88</sup> Cynthia Hahn, “Visio Dei: Changes in Medieval Visuality,” *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing How Others Saw*, ed. Robert Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169–96; here 169.

<sup>89</sup> Hahn, “Visio Dei,” 174.

<sup>90</sup> Hahn, “Visio Dei,” 175. The first passage is an internal quote from William of Conches.

<sup>91</sup> Hahn, “Visio Dei,” 175. This notion, and a corresponding taboo regarding the viewing of deformities by pregnant women, is common in many cultures.

<sup>92</sup> Augustine, *S. Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis episcopi de Trinitate libri quindecim*, 11.2.5, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1845), vol. 42, col. 988: “Licet uidere corpusculum chamaeleontis ad colores quos uidet facillima conuersione uariari. Aliorum autem animalium, quia non est ad conuersionem facilis corpulentia, fetus plerumque produunt libidines matrum quid cum magna delectatione conspexerint.”

Similarly, Gregory the Great noted that “whatever is contemplated in the presence of false images is painted on the heart.”<sup>93</sup> This notion was so important to Gregory that he treated it twice, once in the *Pastoral Care* and again in the *Moralia in Job*.<sup>94</sup> The passage was also translated into Old English (and therefore made available to a broader Anglo-Saxon audience) under the aegis of Alfred the Great.<sup>95</sup>

Although, as Michael Camille argues, theories of intromission attain currency only in the later Middle Age, these passages, and their wide currency throughout the Middle Ages, demonstrate that, since Augustine, it was widely believed that the viewed could deeply (and permanently) impact the viewer.<sup>96</sup> The *text* of the *Wonders*, if treated with serious contemplation (and there is little evidence for casual browsing of texts in the early Middle Ages, and much for heavy contemplation thereof<sup>97</sup>) might have had a strong impact, but early medieval theories of vision endow *images* as well with an immediate power, striking the soul “instantaneously and with completeness,” thereby becoming “a constitutive force of character.”<sup>98</sup> Indeed, for Augustine, “the soul is ‘fitted together’ with, or ‘takes the shape of’ the objects of its focused attention.”<sup>99</sup> For the medieval authors cited above, vision was a terribly powerful force. The image of the *Blemmye* is clearly different in kind from images created for Christian contemplation. But the striking

<sup>93</sup> Gregory the Great, *Sancti Gregorii Magni, romani pontificis, regulae pastoralis liber, ad Joannem episcopum civitatis Ravennae*, 2.10.81, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1845), vol. 77, col. 45D: “quasi in corde depingitur quidquid fictis imaginibus deliberando, cogitator.”

<sup>94</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, XXVI, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1845), vol. 76. Both of these sources, as well as Augustine, are discussed in Margaret Miles, “Vision: The Eye of the Body and the Eye of the Mind in Saint Augustine’s *De trinitate* and *Confessions*,” *The Journal of Religion* 63, 2 (1983): 125–42.

<sup>95</sup> *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*. EETS, OS, 45 and 50 (London: Trübner & Co., 1871–1872), 157: “Forðy wæs suiðe wel gecueden ðæt hit wære atiefred, forðæm ðonne mon smeað on his mode ymb hwelc eorðlic ðing, ðonne deð he suelce he hit amete & atiefre on his heortan, & sua tweolice & unfæsðlice he atiefreð ðæs ðinges onlicnesse on his mode ðe he ðonne ymb smeað” (“Therefore [it] was very well said that it was drawn, for when one meditates in his mind on some earthly thing, then he does as if he paints and draws it in his heart, and thus, doubtfully and indistinctly, he draws the likeness of the thing in his mind which he then meditates on”).

<sup>96</sup> Hahn, “Visio Dei,” 174, notes that this idea is also covered by Robert Grosseteste and Adelard of Bath, among others. See also Elkins, 11–12.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 71–73. See also David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 161.

<sup>98</sup> Hahn, “Visio Dei,” 177.

<sup>99</sup> Miles, “Vision,” with internal quotation from Augustine, *De trinitate*. She is likely referring to Augustine, *De trinitate*, 10.6, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 42, col. 978: “Ita enim conformatur eis quodam modo, non id existendo, sed putando.”



gaze of the *Blemmye*, and its association of the eye and the female body suggests that the eye—of viewer as well as image—is both penetrating and penetrated in the act of viewing.<sup>100</sup> Although in terms of scientific articulation, we cannot argue for an early introduction of theories of intromission in Anglo-Saxon England, or, in representational terms, for what Camille calls the “spectacular interpenetration of image and viewer,”<sup>101</sup> in this manuscript this image and others argue for a self-conscious approach in these representations to both the processes of perception, and dangers inherent in those processes.

## 6. Visual Danger

Although the suture-rupturing eyes of the *Blemmye* strike us at first as being exceptional within the manuscript, the image of the *Blemmye* also functions to direct us to revisit other images. If, after reading the *Blemmye*, we return to the other images, we see that their gazes may not be as deflected as they at first appear. Many of the eyes in the manuscript are rendered in the same sort of compound perspectives commonly associated with ancient Egyptian art; the faces are in profile or three-quarter view, but the eyes are in frontal view. We see this perhaps most noticeably in the *Cynocephalus* and in the shepherd accompanying the *Lertice*. In both cases, the figures’ faces are shown in full profile, and yet their eyes stare uncannily out at us, drawing us into their world and implicating us in their actions. Edward Said argues that, as foils against which the West can make claims about itself, “the Oriental” (constructed as “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, ‘different’; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, ‘normal.’”) “is contained and represented by dominating frameworks.”<sup>102</sup> However, in the

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<sup>100</sup> Oswald, “Indecent Bodies,” following Michael Camille, similarly associates the erasure of sexual organs in images and texts with the erasure of eyes and faces: “Faces were often erased because of ‘the power of the face to behold,’ which is linked with the ‘evil eye’ (141). Indeed, Camille notes the power of images to act on observers, recounting multiple injunctions to pregnant women *not* to look at bestiaries, particularly ‘dog-headed apes or monkeys’ (143), which might result in the women giving birth to similarly deformed children. Thus demons and monsters, especially their faces, are often erased from manuscripts (144). Sexual erasures, often the removal of genitals, are also traditionally linked to the ‘evil eye’ (146), although Camille suggests that these erasures might also result from “prudery and looking at what should not be seen, the sexual organs” (146).” Oswald, “Indecent Bodies,” 19–20. Oswald here cites Michael Camille, “Obscenity Under Erasure: Censorship in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts,” *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski. Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions, 4 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998), 139–54.

<sup>101</sup> Camille, *Gothic Art*, 183.

<sup>102</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 40.

muddy and unstable context of the *Wonders*, and of Anglo-Saxon culture more broadly, this containment of the eastern Other rapidly collapses, as the suture fails not only with the *Blemmye*'s gaze, but over and over throughout the manuscript. Here, "everyone is an Argus, covered with eyes, and the same is true of objects."<sup>103</sup> Indeed, even the Lakes of the Moon and the Sun seem as if a pair of wide eyes, staring fixedly out at us (Fig. 14).

It is the direct, confrontational stare of the *Blemmye* that draws our attention to this phenomenon, and thereby reveals the dangerous threat which is present *throughout* the *Wonders*. Everywhere we look, everywhere we fix our gaze, we are imperiled by these disjointed eyes, which in turn gaze back at us, ever alert, unchanging, unblinking.

## 7. Conclusions: Grasping the *Blemmye*'s Body

The most obvious threat of the *Wonders* lies in their confusion of categorical boundaries. The *Blemmye* is not among the more obvious examples of this transgression; it has no dog's head, no boar's tusks, no ox's tail. It is composed solely of human elements, albeit rearranged, lacking, and supplemented. However, it is within the sharp lines delineating the triangle between its legs that the *Blemmye* tangles the most critical of classificatory bounds. As transsexual author Jane Fry writes in her autobiography:

If people can't put a label on you they get confused . . . People have to know what you are . . . You categorise in your mind. One of the first things you do is determine the sex—if you can't do that, the whole system blows up.<sup>104</sup>

We are used to firm dichotomies, artificial though they generally are. Donna Haraway provides an extensive list of the major binary divisions for Western society:

self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Elkins, *The Object Stares Back*, 49.

<sup>104</sup> Robert Bogdan and Jane Fry, *Being Different: The Autobiography of Jane Fry* (New York: John Wiley, 1974), 96 (cited in Annie Woodhouse, *Fantastic Women: Sex, Gender, and Transvestim* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 5. This text was constructed from a series of taped interviews of Jane Fry, a male-to-female pre-operative transsexual.

<sup>105</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (London: Routledge, 2006), 103–18; here 113.

Haraway argues that “high tech culture challenges these dualisms in intriguing ways.”<sup>106</sup> So, too, does the culture of the Anglo-Saxons. The *Wonders* challenges most if not all of these dualisms. Suzanne Lewis, by way of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, argues that the medieval body, rather than maintaining these dichotomies, actively works to break them down:

The [medieval] body can thus be construed as a site of resistance and challenge, involving the transcendence or deconstruction of seemingly fixed dichotomies, such as male/female, human/beast, body/soul, at the same time as the body itself seems to delineate the contours of such culturally constructed oppositions.<sup>107</sup>

As the *Blemmye* resists categorization as either clothed or naked, as either human or non-human (as do many of the wonders), and also as either male or female, the figure of the *Blemmye* challenges the system of difference by which culture itself is established.

Rather than presenting images that are one or the other, or merely somewhat ambiguous or androgynous, the *Wonders* seems to present beings that are both at once or neither at all, refusing perfect resolutions of forms and allowing its inhabitants to reside, however improbably, not between but simultaneously at both poles. The *Blemmye*’s wave-filled triangle is at once at *his* chin and between *her* legs, at once suggestive of a beard and of genitals, part of the *Blemmye*’s clothing and part of its body, all at once. In part, it is the genre of the *Wonders* that enables representations which so literally confound the categorizing binaries: most of the creatures depicted in this tradition are clearly and intentionally depicted as *monstrous*. We argue, however, that moments of pause and illegibility in these texts, like that caused by the *Blemmye*’s embodied gaze, disallow readings of these creatures as simply monstrous, as simply objects, as simply not-us; instead, these moments urge contemporary viewers to examine themselves caught in the act of viewing and reading.

If we are tempted to view this extended gaze at the monstrous genitals of the *Blemmye* as much ado about nothing, or worse, simply the prurient bent of the modern authors, we should, to counteract this temptation, follow Classen’s respect for “the tremendous, far-reaching influence of sexuality,” which can be traced back to the Middle Ages, and consider that perhaps “there has hardly ever been any other inner force in human life that impacted culture, religion, politics, and economy more.”<sup>108</sup> As Classen notes in his introduction, “even the public discourse

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<sup>106</sup> Haraway, “Cyborg Manifesto,” 113.

<sup>107</sup> Lewis, “Medieval Bodies,” 27.

<sup>108</sup> Classen, “The Cultural Significance of Sexuality,” § 3.

during the Anglo-Saxon times reflects definite elements pertaining to sex and sexuality."<sup>109</sup>

Specifically, we should recall that the genitals were declared to be of great importance in the Anglo-Saxon law codes. The code of Æthelberht reads, "If anyone destroys the generative organ, let him pay three wergilds for it."<sup>110</sup> As Lisi Oliver notes, this is the highest compensation for any injury.<sup>111</sup> But equally salient, the focus on the genitals in this image provides what Glenn Davis has termed with respect to the so-called "obscene" riddles, "a point of contact" between this image, the context of the *Wonders*, and the larger context of Old English literature:<sup>112</sup> the question of the present/absent genitalia in this image is contiguous with other questions in Old English literature and art, as well as in contemporary readings thereof—questions of the nature of the gaze, the relationship of the gaze to the body, the continuity of the body with the subject, the place of the subject in space and time.

Sarah Higley argues that *Exeter Book* Riddle 12 may well be intentionally unclear, making pious monastic readers struggle and sweat over exactly what lewd meaning is concealed in the vague grammar of the poem.<sup>113</sup> So too, perhaps these images bear an intentional vagueness, in order to make us spend time puzzling over their potential obscenities, their transgressions of elemental binaries. Yet these images, and the texts with which they are partnered, not only encourage contemplation but also insistently evade and deny resolution. Like the wild beasts and incendiary fowl in the opening few pages of the *Wonders*, these images withdraw from and punish attempts to apprehend them: "gif hi hwylc man niman wille oþpe him o/ æthreñð þonne forbærnað hy sona ealle his/ lic" ("if any man wishes to grasp them or ever touches them, then they burn at once all his body").<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Classen, "The Cultural Significance of Sexuality," § 3.

<sup>110</sup> Mary P. Richards, "The Body as Text in Early Anglo-Saxon Law," *Naked Before God*, 105. As a wergild was the value of a man's life, it is noteworthy that the genitals were worth three times the life of their owner.

<sup>111</sup> Lisi Oliver, *Beginnings of English Law*. Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations, 14 (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 99. Mary P. Richards, "Body as Text," 105, argues that this is due not only to the loss of future offspring, but also to the shame and embarrassment of such a wound.

<sup>112</sup> Glenn Davis, "The Exeter Book Riddles and the Place of Sexual Idiom in Old English Literature," *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola McDonald (York: York Medieval Press, 2006), 39–54; here 54.

<sup>113</sup> Sarah L. Higley, "The Wanton Hand: Reading and Reaching into Grammars and Bodies in Old English Riddle 12," *Naked Before God*, 29–59; here 57.

<sup>114</sup> *Wonders*, 2.11–13.

For Davis, in the context of the *Exeter Book* riddles, it is precisely in such language of touch (including the use of words like “æthrinan” [“touch”]), and of apprehension, that the erotic riddles make contact with the larger body of Old English literature. Davis suggests that in these riddles the ubiquity of double entendres involving the hands may reflect “simply the literal and metaphorical flexibility of the hands . . . a plasticity that allows them to function in a wide range of contexts,” but this language also resonates in the contexts of both Christian and secular texts, which “employ actions like touching, gripping, and grabbing to allude to specific sexual acts or to describe more general states of sexual purity and impurity.”<sup>115</sup> The sexualization of approach to the *Wonders* represented in the incendiary encounters described above and perhaps suggested by the punishment of desire to touch or grasp them is certainly born out in the subsequent development of the genre of the *Wonders* into what Irvin C. Schick describes as “ethnopornography”<sup>116</sup> in the modern period. Given this context, the *Blemmye*’s both/and/neither/nor genitals thus may function not only as an acknowledgment of desire in the viewing of these wonders, but also as a reminder that such desire—to “touch” (“æthrinan”) but also to “grasp” or “comprehend” (“niman”) is dangerous to the bodies of wonders and viewers alike.

The potential embodiment of the viewer’s response is clearly evident in the repeated warnings of the dangers of touching the wonders. We argue that these warnings against embodied touch point to the ways in which these images—the illustration of the *Blemmye* perhaps most clearly—represent the processes by which we understand, read, or apprehend them. As the images of the *Wonders* represent these processes, they also represent the limits thereof: the blinding of the object, the exclusion and fragmentation of the body, the leakage between impossible binaries, including that of male and female. Through their representation of these

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<sup>115</sup> Davis, “Exeter Book Riddles,” 44–45.

<sup>116</sup> Irvin Cemil Schick, *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteritist Discourse* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 62. Schick, however, notes that Walter Edmund Roth used the term as early as 1935. See also Mary B. Campbell, “The Illustrated Travel Book and the Birth of Ethnography: Part I of De Bry’s America,” *The Work of Dissimilitude: Essays from the Sixth Citadel Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: University of Delaware Press, and London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1988), 177–95. Campbell argues that the early modern development of the illustrated travel book, with its eye-witness narrative and nascent empiricism, marks a departure from the illustrated medieval texts following “a grotesque tradition of monster lore conventionally associated with the margins of the known world,” 177. Yet as her epigraph, “Caramba! flesh is exciting / even in empirical pictures! No?” from Frank O’Hara’s “A Postcard from John Ashbery,” reinforces, the illustrated travel narrative also retains as a continuity with the medieval monster tradition an *affect* associated with the representation of the exposed body. For Schick, this affect develops in the modern era in one branch of ethnographic literature and illustration into the tradition he calls “ethnopornography” (see above).

limits, and through their insistence on embodiment, these images suggest that the ways we read them may be as dangerous to our own corporal integrity as they are integral to our claim to coherence. At the same time, however, these images endure; they remain in the state of suspension before they flee or burn up, or burn up the invasive reader. These images thus remind us that in the state of pause into which they throw us at least for a moment, that state between incoherence and resolution, the state, that is, of wonder, we too can allow for the coexistence of subject and object, naked and nude, particularity and universality, fragmentation and coherence.



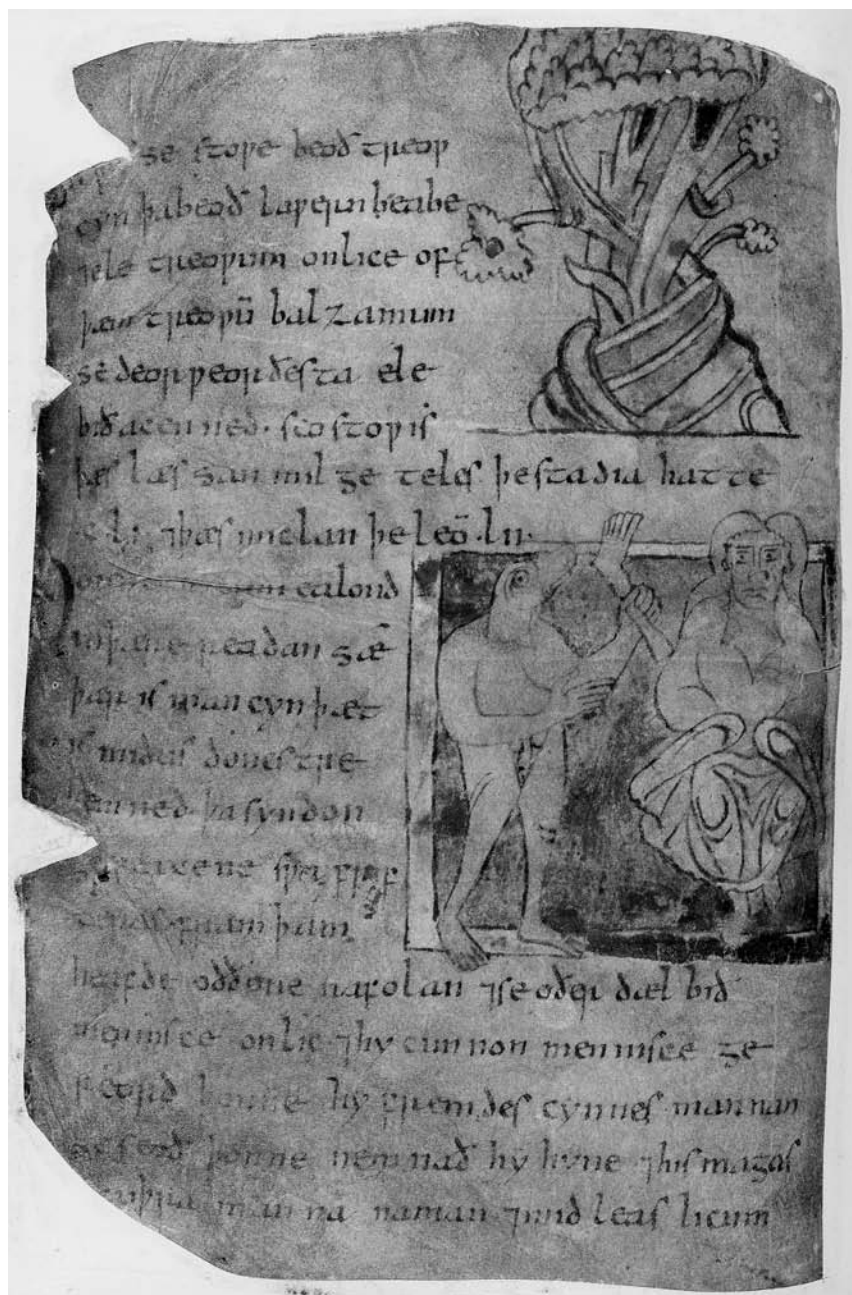


Fig. 2: Vitellius Donestre, London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv



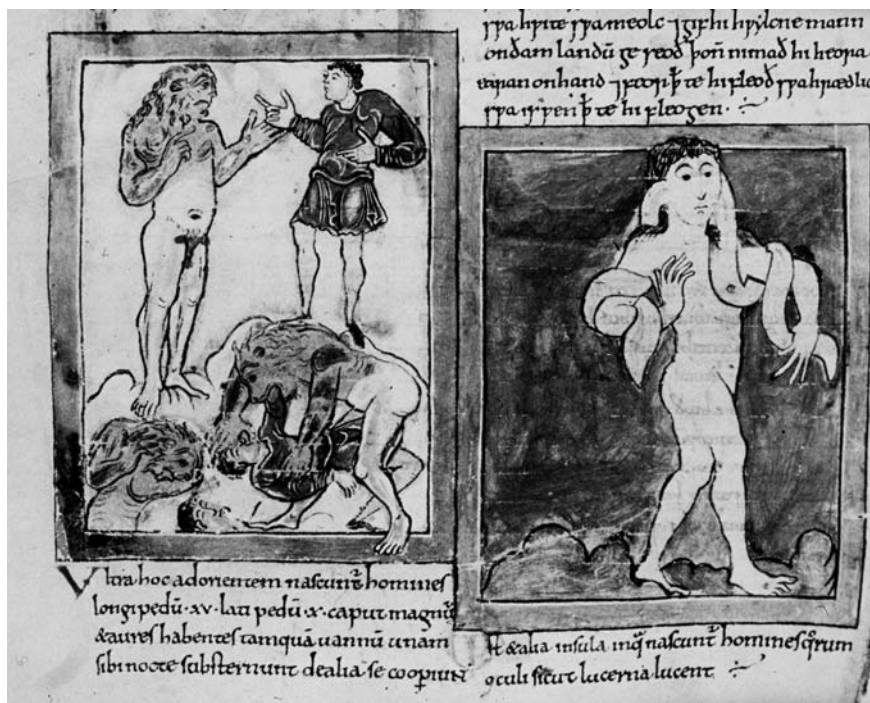


Fig. 3: Tiberius Donestre, London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.v



Fig. 4: Vitellius Bearded Woman, London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv



Fig. 5: Barberini Gospels Beard-Puller, Vatican, MS Biblioteca Apostolica, Vatican, Barb. lat 570

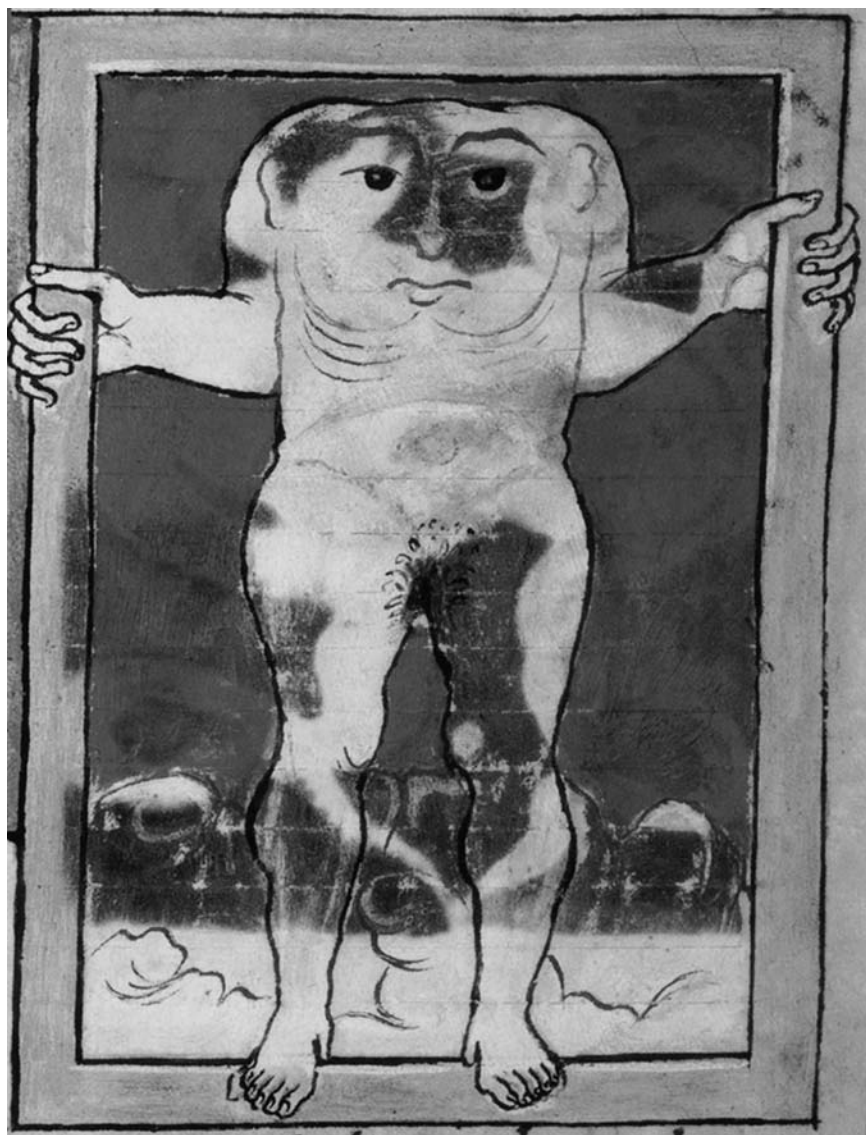


Fig. 6: Tiberius Blemmye, London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.v

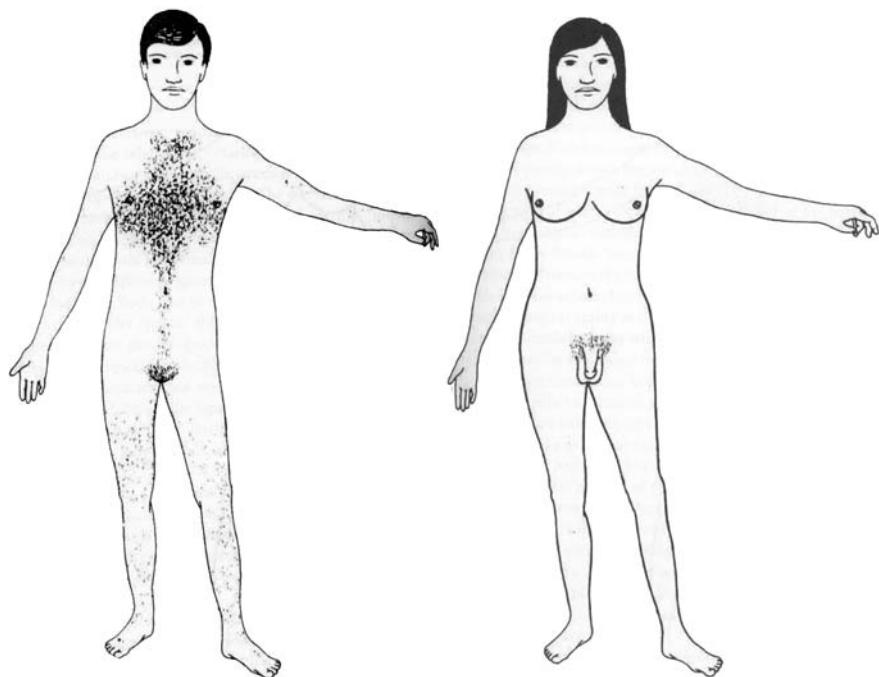


Fig. 7: Kessler and McKenna, *Ambiguous Images*



Fig: 8. Kilpeck Sheela-na-gig





Fig. 10: Eugenia, 13th Century Antependium



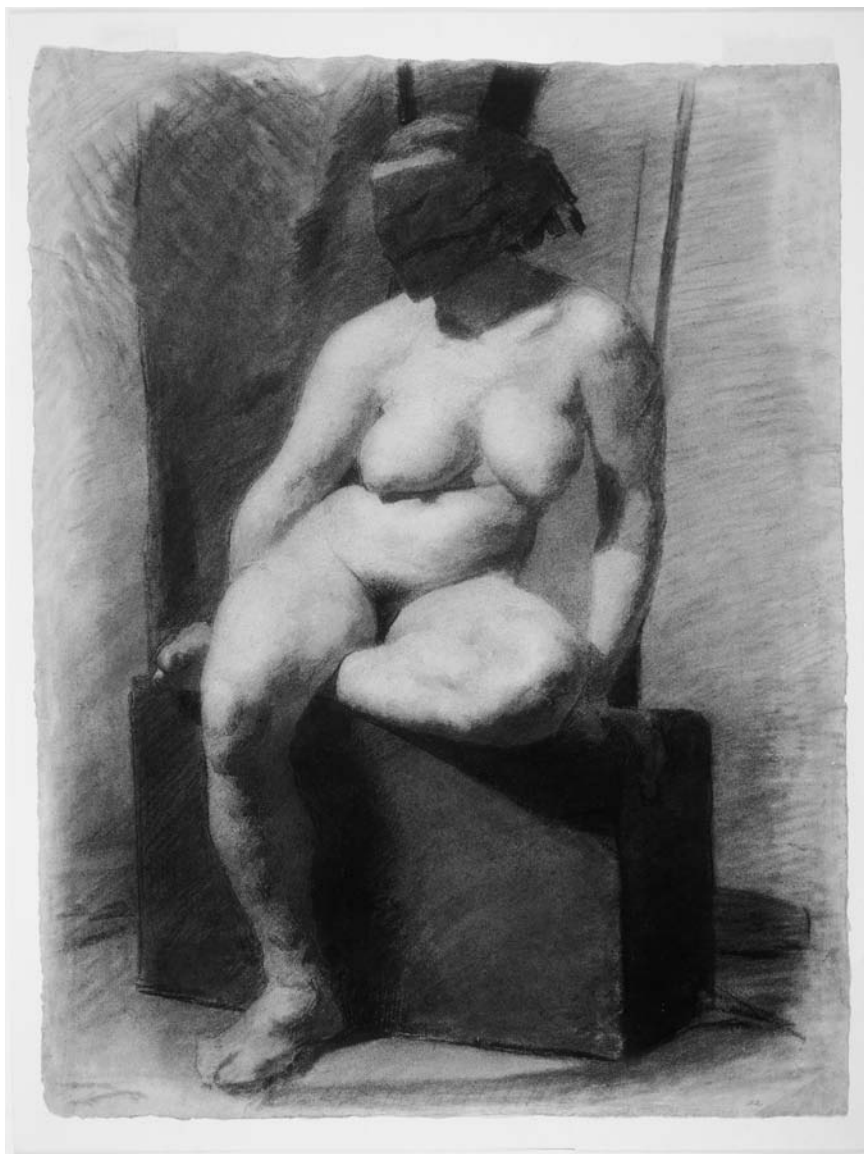


Fig. 11: Thomas Eakins, *Nude Woman Seated Wearing a Mask*, ca. 1865-1866, The Philadelphia Museum of Art



Fig. 12: René Magritte, *The Rape*, 1934, the Menil Collection, Houston



Fig. 13: Sheela-na-gig, Fethard, Tullaroan, County Kilkenny  
(By permission of Jennifer Borland)



Fig. 14: Vitellius Lakes of the Moon and the Sun, London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv



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## Lust ohne Liebe Roswitha von Gandersheim und geschlechtsspezifische Strafen für sündigen Sex<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

As scholarship has observed for a long time, the Saxon canoness Hrovit of Gandersheim demonstrated in her creative work a significant interest in human sexual behavior. Curiously, in her work the poet assigns less severe penalties to women who have committed a sin of the flesh than to men in almost the identical situation. This article demonstrates that these gender-specific forms of punishments result from different types of sexual experience on the part of the female and the male figures created by Hrotsvit. Two examples, the religious tales of *Gongolf* and *Basilius*, illustrate how the poet's male characters sin mostly only out of sensual lust, whereas the female characters transgress mostly because of love. Ultimately, it is this love that saves these women from eternal condemnation and imposes milder penalties upon them, whereas the men are condemned harshly and die miserably. [AC]

Die deutliche Vorliebe der sächsischen Kanonissin Roswithas von Gandersheim für etwas gewagtere Themen – zumindest was ihre Dramen und Legenden betrifft<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ich möchte mich bei Peter Dinzelsbacher (Werfen bei Salzburg) und Albrecht Classen (Tucson, AZ) für ihre kritische Lektüre und Kommentare bedanken.

<sup>2</sup>

Ihre Geschichtsschreibung, d.h. die *Gesta Ottonis* und die *Primordia coenobii Gandesheimensis*, kann wohl davon ausgeschlossen werden, obwohl auch dort stellenweise die Keuschheit, also Absteine von Sex durch bestimmte Personen, hervorgehoben wird. So z.B. bei Billung und Aeda, Vorfahren der ottonischen Familie und der ersten Gandersheimer Äbtissinnen. Zuerst einmal davon überzeugt, eine keusche Ehe zu führen, geben beide diese Idee erst auf, nachdem Joahannes der Täufer Aeda von dem Ruhm ihrer Nachkommen erzählt (*Primordia* v. 53–67). Dass hier die mit Sex verbundenen Probleme eher spärlich sind, kann wohl damit erklärt werden, dass das Thema bereits vorgegeben ist, und Roswithas motivische Freiheit somit erheblich beeinträchtigt wird. Zu Roswitha allgemein siehe den einführenden Artikel von Albrecht Classen, Eva Parra und Alfonso Sabacho Sánchez, "Roswitha von Gandersheim," *The Literary Encyclopedia*. 14 Mar.

–, ist schon vor Jahrzehnten in der Forschung mit besonderer Aufmerksamkeit beachtet worden.<sup>3</sup> Die Dichterin war sich selbst ihrer eher außergewöhnlichen Themen völlig bewußt.<sup>4</sup> In der Vorrede zu ihren Dramen versuchte sie deswegen, einer möglichen Mißbilligung bei allzu doktrinär denkenden Lesern vorzubeugen:

Hoc tamen facit non raro verecundari gravique rubore perfundi, quod, huiusmodi specie dictationis cogente detestabilem inlicite amantium dementia et male dulcia colloquia eorum, quae nec nostro auditui permittuntur accommodari, dictando mente tractavi et stili officio designavi. Sed [si] haec erubescendo neglegerem, nec proposito satisfacerem nec innocentium laudem adeo plene iuxta meum posse exponerem, quia, quante blanditiae amentium ad illiciendum promptiores, tanto et superni adiutoris gloria, praesertim cum feminea fragilitas vinceret et virilis robur confusio subiaceret.<sup>5</sup>

[Freilich dann und wann errötete ich vor Scham weil ich, gezwungen durch diese Dichtart, sündige Liebesraserei und falsche Schmeichelreden, die man sich sonst nicht einmal hört an, nun in meinem Geiste vernahm und mit dem Griffel festzuhalten begann. Doch hätte ich mein Erröten nicht bezwungen, dann wäre mir mein Vorhaben nicht gelungen, niemals hätte ich der Unschuldigen Lob so nach Kräften besungen. Denn je verführerischer die buhlerischen Schmeichelreden, umso strahlender wird dagegen der Glorienschein des himmlischen Helfers und der triumphierenden Sieger sein, vor allem, wenn weibliche Schwachheit siegt und männliche Kraft hilflos unterliegt.<sup>6</sup>]

Es besteht wohl kein Zweifel daran, dass sich Roswitha wie kaum eine andere literarisch tätige Frau ihrer und der direkt darauf folgenden Zeiten sehr für das

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2005. The Literary Dictionary Company. 25 October 2007. <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5891&sType=variantspellings>> (auf Englisch; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Jung, *Die Geschlechtsmoral des deutschen Weibes im Mittelalter: Eine kulturhistorische Studie* (Leipzig: Ethnologischer Verlag, 1921); Ewald Erb, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur: Von den Anfängen bis 1160. Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. Bd. 1 (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1962) 196–98. Überraschend schienen beiden Forschern, dass eine ihr Leben der Kirche widmende Frau sich so eingehend mit dem menschlichen Sexualverhalten zu beschäftigen wusste. Selbst die Tatsache, dass Roswitha keine Nonne, sondern lediglich Kanonissin gewesen ist, und ihre Pflichten gegenüber der Kirche so jederzeit aufgegeben werden konnten, konnte diese Verwunderung nicht eindämmen (Kurt Kronenberg, *Roswitha von Gandersheim, Leben und Werk* (Bad Gandersheim: Hertel, 1962); Kurt Kronenberg, *Roswitha von Gandersheim und ihre Zeit* (Bad Gandersheim: Hertel, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Zumindest für eine der Kirche zugewandte Frau scheinen sexuelle Themen nicht unbedingt angebracht.

<sup>5</sup> Zitiert nach *Hrotsvithae Opera*, mit Einleitung und Kommentar von Helene Homeyer (München: Schöningh, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Zitiert nach Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, hg. Helene Homeyer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1936), 142. Ich ziehe diese Übersetzung der von 1970 vor, da sie mir wortgetreuer scheint.

menschliche Sexualverhalten interessiert hat.<sup>7</sup> Hieraus aber gleich zu folgern, wie es Scherr mit seiner beliebten, Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts formulierten These unternahm,<sup>8</sup> dass sich diese als erste deutsche Dichterin bekannte Autorin,<sup>9</sup> bevor sie ihre kirchliche Laufbahn einschlug, auch mit (geschlechtlicher?) Liebe vertraut gewesen sein müsse, scheint jedoch vielleicht etwas zu weit hergeholt. Leicht lassen sich auch andere Beweggründe für Roswithas angebliche "Sexbesessenheit" aufdecken, die weniger nachteilig für ihr Ansehen in der Literaturwissenschaft sind. In meiner früheren Untersuchung "Roswitha und die Liebe"<sup>10</sup> habe ich

<sup>7</sup> Andere Autorinnen, wie z. B. Hildegard von Bingen, haben sich auch eingehend mit Sex beschäftigt, nur schien dies weniger auffallend, da dem anscheinend eine wissenschaftliche Motivation zugrunde lag. Vgl. Eva Parra Membrives, "Sexualidad transgresora en escritos femeninos medievales," *Cuerpo y género. La construcción de la sexualidad humana*, ed. Miriam Palma y Eva Parra (Jerez: Ediciones Jerezanas, 2004), 267–95

<sup>8</sup> "Allerdings könnte man etwas stutzig werden über den Umstand, daß unsere Gandersheimer Nonne die jungfräulichen Gefühle ihrer Mitschwestern nicht eben sehr schonte. Denn sie bewegt sich, wie wir gesehen, mit einer gewissen Vorliebe in verfänglichen Situationen. Ob daran ihr Vorbild Terenz allein Schuld war? Oder hatte sie in jungen Jahren der Liebe Lust und Leid selbst erfahren und blickte nun mit einem aus heimlichem Wohlgefallen und altjungferlicher Seelensäure gemischten Gefühl auf jene Erfahrungen zurück? Es könnte manchmal fast so scheinen," Johannes Scherr, *Geschichte der deutschen Frauen*, (Leipzig: Wigand, 1860), 117; Gustav Jung, *Die Geschlechtsmoral des deutschen Weibes im Mittelalter. Eine kulturhistorische Studie* (Leipzig: Ethnologischer Verlag, 1921), 200, zitiert, ohne Seitenangabe, folgende, stark kompromittierende, Stelle aus Scherrs *Geschichte deutscher Kultur und Sitte* (Leipzig: Wiegand, 1852): "Der Zweck Roswithas bei Abfassung ihrer sechs kleinen Dramen war aber ein moralisch-asketischer, wie er einer Nonne geziemt. Allein es will uns bedünken, daß wir ihrer Nonnenhaftigkeit kaum zu nahe treten, wenn wir vermuten, daß sie, bevor sie ihre Komödien schrieb, sich nicht nur im Terenz, sondern auch in der Liebe umgesehen haben müsse."

<sup>9</sup> Diese chronologische Position der Roswitha wird in der Forschung immer wieder hervorgehoben (z.B. Homeyer, *Roswitha v. on Ganderheim*,; Bert Nagel, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim* [Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965]). Zugleich wäre im Gegensatz dazu hervorzuheben, dass die Dichterin in der Literaturgeschichte nicht dafür erwähnt wird, dass sie als einzige Autorin des 10. Jahrhunderts ein umfangreiches und verschiedene literarische Genres umfassendes Werk schuf. Vgl. Eva Parra Membrives, *Roswitha von Gandersheim*, (Madrid: Del Orto, 2001), 12. Ich bezweifle jedoch, dass Roswithas Stellung als erste deutsche Schriftstellerin sich immer noch ganz ungefochten verteidigen lässt. Wenn man den Begriff "deutsch" geographisch und nicht sprachlich verstehen will, was ja auch bei Roswitha unangebracht wäre, so müsste der thüringisch geborenen Radegunde von Poitiers, als Autorin einiger, laut Nisard fälschlicherweise Venantius Fortunatus zugeschriebenen Gedichte der Vorrang gegeben werden, eine These, die auch Peter Dronke verteidigt: Peter Dronke, *Women Writers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984), siehe auch Charles Nisard, "Des poésies de Sainte Radegonde attribuées jusqu'ici à Fortunat," *Revue historique* 37 (1888): 49–57; hier 6. Auch bei Hugeburcs von Heidenheim *Vita Winnebaldi* könnte unter Umständen von "deutscher Dichtung" gesprochen werden. Die Nonne ist zwar angelsächsischer Herkunft, wurde aber in Heidenheim erzogen und schrieb dort ihre Texte. Vgl. ebenfalls Eva Parra Membrives, *Mundos femeninos emancipados. Reconstrucción teórico-emprica de una propuesta literaria femenina en la Edad Media alemana* (Zaragoza: Anubar, 1998), 91, Anm. 2

<sup>10</sup> Eva Parra Membrives, "Roswitha und die Liebe," *Miscellània en Honor del Knut Forssmann*, ed.



bereits versucht, für das in der Tat auffallende Interesse der sächsischen Autorin an – zu ihrer Zeit jedenfalls – als unnatürlich eingestuftem sexuellen Verhaltensweisen wie Sodomie<sup>11</sup> und Nekrophilie<sup>12</sup> oder auch an “nur” sozial gebrandmarkten wie der Prostitution<sup>13</sup> andere Erklärungen zu finden, als die Erinnerungen an ein bereits zurückgelassenes Sexleben. Ich erkläre dort, wie die wiederholte Beschäftigung der Dichterin mit Sex als nichts anderes als eine direkte Folge der stark negativ beurteilten Sexualisierung der mittelalterlichen Frau, vor allem seitens der wichtigsten Kirchenväter,<sup>14</sup> verstanden werden müsste, ohne

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Macià Riutort y Jordi Jané (Tarragona: Arola Editors, 2006), 271–84.

- <sup>11</sup> Zur Zeit wird nicht immer zwischen homoerotischer und heteroerotischer Sodomie unterschieden, Vern L. Bullough, “The Sin against Nature and Homosexuality,” *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1982); James A. Brundage, “Let Me Count the Ways: Canonists and Theologians Contemplate Coital Positions,” *Journal of Medieval History* 10 (1984): 81–93; Hermann Joseph Schmitz, *Die Bußbücher und die Bußdisziplin der Kirche: Nach handschriftlichen Quellen dargestellt* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1883), 526; *Die Bußordnungen der abendländischen Kirche*, ed. Friedrich Wasserschleben und Hermann Wilhelm (Halle: Graeger, 1851), 653; John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980), 105–06; die Praxis ist aus dem Grund zu verachten, weil sie in der fleischlichen Lust ihr einziges Ziel setzt und die eventuelle Nachkommenschaft völlig ausschließt. So Spreitzer in Bezug auf St Paulus: “seine Ermahnungen richten sich jedoch gegen schrankenlosen sexuellen Genuss, nicht prinzipiell gegen jedwede homosexuelle Handlung.” Brigitte Spreitzer, *Die stumme Sünde. Homosexualität im Mittelalter: Mit einem Textanhang*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 498 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1988), 6. Auch wird die Sodomie mit Ketzerei in Verbindung gesetzt: Edith Benkov, “The Erased Lesbian: Sodomy and the Legal Tradition in Medieval Europe,” *Same Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Pamela Sheingorn (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 101–22; *Das Stadtbuch von Augsburg, insbesondere das Stadtrecht vom Jahre 1276*, ed. Christian Meyer (Augsburg: F. Butsch Sohn, 1872), 107–08. Gregor IX. war sogar fest davon überzeugt, dass ein Teufelspakt immer durch Sodomie abgeschlossen wurde: Joseph Hansen, *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter: Mit einer Untersuchung des Wortes Hexe von Johannes Franck* (Bonn: Georgi, 1901), 149. Laut Spreitzer, *Die stumme Sünde*, kann vor dem 19. Jahrhundert eigentlich nicht von Homosexualität als sexueller Identität gesprochen werden.
- <sup>12</sup> Mit Nekrophilie im Mittelalter hat sich die Forschung weit weniger beschäftigt, obwohl man in diesem Kontext wohl Robert L. Masters, *Sex Crimes in History: Evolving Concepts of Sadism, Lust Murder, and Necrophilia, from Ancient to Modern Times* (New York: Julian Press, 1963), zitieren sollte.
- <sup>13</sup> Zur sozialen Stellung der Prostituierten siehe z.B. Jacques Rossiaud, *Dame Venus: Prostitution im Mittelalter* (München: Beck, 1994), aus dem Ital. übertr. von Ernst Voltmer (Orig. *La prostituzione nel medioevo* [Bari: Laterza, 1995]); Dagmar Hemmie, *Ungeordnete Unzucht* (Wien: Böhlau, 2007); Frank Meier, *Gaukler, Dirnen, Rattenfänger: Aussenseiter im Mittelalter* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2005); James A. Brundage, “Prostitution in the Medieval Canon Law,” *Signs* 1 (1976): 825–45.
- <sup>14</sup> Siehe v.a. Leah Otis-Cour, *Lust und Liebe: Geschichte der Paarbeziehungen im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2000), 48; James A. Brundage, “Carnal Delight: Canonistic Theories of Sexuality,” *Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress of Medieval Canon Law*. Monumenta iuris canonici, Subsidia, vol 6, ed. Stephan Kuttner and Kenneth Pennington (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1980), 361–85; Alfred Karnein, “Wie Feuer und Holz. Aspekte der Ausgrenzung von Frauen beim Thema Liebe im 13. Jahrhundert,” *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*

dass dabei eigene Erfahrungen der Autorin auf diesem heiklen Gebiet zu vermuten wären. Bei dieser Untersuchung fiel mir dann besonders auf, dass die voll ausgelebte Sexualität der verschiedenen Figuren der Roswitha nicht in jedem Fall musterhaft bestraft wird. In einigen Fällen lässt sich sogar so etwas wie ein unterschiedlicher Maßstab bei Männern und Frauen in Bezug auf Vergehen im Sexualbereich und die darauffolgenden Strafen entdecken. Roswithas weibliche Figuren scheinen überraschenderweise weniger streng beurteilt zu werden als die männlichen, was besonders auffällt, wenn sich beide des gleichen Vergehens schuldig machen. Man könnte diese Eigenartigkeit Roswithas vielleicht als Solidarität mit ihren Geschlechtsgenossinnen auslegen,<sup>15</sup> eine Art Ausgleich also für die üblicherweise nachteilige Behandlung der weiblichen Sexualität bei anderen kirchlichen Autoren. Trotzdem schien aber eine eingehendere Beschäftigung mit dem Thema doch angebracht, um eventuell weniger emotionelle Gründe aufzudecken. Damit soll sich nun der vorliegende Aufsatz befassen, in dem einige der Legenden Roswithas exemplarisch im Hinblick auf einen genderbezogenen Maßstab der Autorin untersucht werden.

Wenn wir chronologisch vorgehen wollen, dann ist der erste, für unser Anliegen bedeutsame Text die Legende *Gongolfus*,<sup>16</sup> wahrscheinlich zwischen 955 und 959 entstanden,<sup>17</sup> und, aufgrund seiner frühzeitigen Stellung in Roswithas

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74 (1989), 93–115; Albert Mitterer, „Mann und Weib nach dem biologischen Weltbild des hl. Thomas und dem der Gegenwart,“ *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 57 (1933): 491–556; Eva Parra Membrives, „Representaciones de lo masculino en la literatura medieval femenina,“ *Representar-representarse. Firmado: mujer* (Moguer: Fundación Juan Ramón Jiménez, 2001), 453–64; Eva Parra Membrives, „Contemplar a una mujer es ser herido por un dardo envenenado,“ *Mujer, cultura y Comunicación: Realidades e imaginarios* (Sevilla: Alfar, 2003) (ed. CD-Rom); Joel T. Rosenthal, *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 66–79; hier 66.

<sup>15</sup> Zu Roswithas Verteidigung der Frauen siehe: E. H. Zeydel, „Hrotsvit von Gandersheim and the Eternal Womanly,“ *Studies in the German Drama: A Festschrift in Honor of Walter Silz*, ed. Donald H. Crosby, and George C. Schoolfield (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), 1–14; Eva Cescuti, *Hrotsvit und die Männer: Konstruktionen von 'Männlichkeit' und 'Weiblichkeit' in der lateinischen Literatur im Umfeld der Ottonen*. Forschungen zur Geschichte der Älteren Deutschen Literatur, 23 (München: Fink, 1998); Jacqueline Murray, „Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives,“ *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana und Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Albrecht Classen, „Violence to Women, Women's Rights, and Their Defenders in Medieval German Literature,“ <http://www3.villanova.edu/DVMA/Classen-Violence.htm> (letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008); siehe jetzt id., *The Power of a Woman's Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literature. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 1 (Berlin und New York: de Gruyter, 2007); Eva Parra Membrives, „Roswithas dichterisches Programm,“ *Kongress der Rumänischen Germanisten* (Timisoara, 2006) (im Druck).

<sup>16</sup> *Passio Sancti Gongolfi martiris*. Die Titel stammen von Conrad Celtis.

<sup>17</sup> So Fidel Rädle, „Die ersten fünf Legenden sind der noch als Lehrerin wirkenden Gerberg

Gesamtwerk, nur bedingt frauenfreundlich.<sup>18</sup> Protagonist ist hier noch der männliche Titelheld, ein französischer Adliger, der, um etwa 720 schriftlich bezeugt, von der Autorin als christlicher Märtyrer dargestellt wird.<sup>19</sup> Die Quellen stimmen darin überein, dass der fromme Aristokrat von seiner namentlich nicht genannten<sup>20</sup> Frau und deren Geliebten hinterhältig ermordet wurde, wenn auch von Roswitha die Anzahl der Sexualpartner der mordenden Gattin auf bloß einen reduziert wird, und sie diesen auch noch, mit einem dem heutigen Leser ironisch anmutenden Effekt, dem geistlichen Stand zuweist.<sup>21</sup>

Das abnorme Sexualverhalten ist hier der Ehebruch, wobei wir natürlich das normative und das sich gegen die Norm auflehrende Verhalten mit einem mittelalterlich-religiösen Blick sehen müssen. Von einem modernen Standpunkt heraus wirkt wohl wahrscheinlich Gongolfus Wunsch, eine keusche Ehe zu führen, nachdem er eine schöne Frau aus gutem Hause als Braut heimführt, als viel eher normabweichend:

“Igri conspicuam proprio iungebat amicam  
Regalem genere et nitidam facie  
Hanc iussit liquidam semper deducere vitam  
Compositam castis moribus<sup>22</sup> et studiis<sup>23</sup>.”<sup>24</sup>

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gewidmet, also wohl vor dem Jahre 959, in dem diese Äbtissin von Gandersheim wurde, entstanden,” Fidel Rädle, “Hrotzvit von Gandersheim,” *Aus der Mündlichkeit in die Schriftlichkeit: Höfische und andere Literatur*, hg. Ursula Liebertz-Grün (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1988), 84–93; hier 85. Vgl. auch Eva Parra Membrives, *Roswitha von Gandersheim* (Madrid: Del Orto, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Gongolfist Roswithas erste nicht heilsgeschichtliche Legende, und sie wagt es hier noch nicht, sich offen frauenfreundlich zu zeigen, wie dies in späteren Texten der Fall ist. Diese These wird von mir genauer erläutert in Eva Parra Membrives, “Deseo y Seducción. Imágenes de Sexualidad y Erotismo en Gongolfus y Calimachus de Roswitha de Gandersheim,” *Escritoras Atlánticas y Escritoras Mediterráneas*, ed. Carmen Ramírez (Sevilla: Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, 2002), 63–83. Auch in Eva Parra Membrives, “Roswithas dichterisches Programm.”

<sup>19</sup> Wie sie selbst in ihrem Prolog sagt: “Sancti Gongolfi martyris egregii,” Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 1970, 99

<sup>20</sup> Zur Relevanz der Anonymität einiger Figuren siehe Eva Parra Membrives, “Crimen como modo de integración? La marginación de *der Rotkopfen Ruodlieb*,” *EPOS XVII* (2001): 327–50.

<sup>21</sup> Da die St Galler *Poenitentiales* verschiedene Strafen für ehebrecherische Geistliche erwähnen, dürfte dies nicht ganz so selten sein. Vgl. Suzanne Fonay Wemple, “Consent and Dissent to Sexual Intercourse in Germanic Societies from the Fifth to the Tenth Century,” *Consent and Coercion to Sex in Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993), 227–43.

<sup>22</sup> Ob mit dem Aufruf zur Keuschheit eine Ehe ohne Sex gemeint wird, geht aus den obengenannten Worten eigentlich nicht klar hervor, Gongolf kann sich auch auf den von Homeyer in ihrer Übersetzung (vgl. Anm. 23) interpretierten “reinen Sittenwandel” beziehen. Die absolute Keuschheit innerhalb der Ehe wird jedoch von Roswitha des öfteren begrüßt, siehe z.B. der Fall der Drusiana in ihrem *Callimachus*. Es muss hier allerdings darauf hingewiesen werden, dass den Frauen auch erlaubt war, auf die Erfüllung der ehelichen Pflichten zu bestehen. Eine

[und nahm sich eine edle Gattin  
 von hoher Abkunft, schönem Äußern.  
 Er hielt sie an, stets nur zu führen  
 Den sittenreinsten Lebenswandel.]<sup>25</sup>

Aber der Aufruf, trotz des ehelichen Standes nicht einmal aus dynastischen Gründen Gebrauch von der Sexualität zu machen, ist ein literarischer Gemeinplatz und lässt sich auch außerhalb Roswithas Dichtung, z.B., in der Spielmannsdichtung finden.<sup>26</sup>

Sobald sie sich entschieden haben, gemeinsam Ehebruch zu begehen, sündigen Gongolfs Frau und ihr geistlicher Liebhaber oft und gerne, so dass das Gerücht allgemein bekannt wird und selbst zu den Ohren des betrogenen Ehemannes gelangt. Um seine Gattin auf die Probe zu stellen, entschließt sich Gongolf zu einem isoldeähnlichen Gottesurteil<sup>27</sup> und lässt die Hand seiner Frau in eiskaltes

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leidenschaftliche Ehefrau musste sich nicht unbedingt mit einer von ihr nicht gewünschten Keuschheit abfinden, denn dies würde bei ihr auch die Nachkommenschaft verhindern. Hierzu vgl. James A. Brundage, „Impotence, Frigidity and Marital Nullity in the Decretists and the Early Decretalists,” *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Medieval Canon Law*, ed. Peter Linehan. Monumenta iuris canonici, Subsidia, 8 (Ciudad del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1988), 407–23; hier 421; Elisabeth Makowski, „The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law,” *Journal of Medieval History* 3 (1977): 99–114

<sup>23</sup> Diese Aufforderung Gongolfs an seine Frau, sich dem Studium zu widmen, überrascht. Es ist zwar bekannt, dass Frauen im Mittelalter nicht selten über eine gewisse Bildung verfügten, aber nicht immer galt diese in einem kirchlichen Kontext als wünschenswert. Vgl. hierzu Sulamith Shahr, *Die Frau im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1985), 152, in Bezug auf Philipp von Navarra. Roswitha setzt hier wohl ihre eigenen Wünsche in Gongolfs Munde.

<sup>24</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotzwithae Opera*, 113.

<sup>25</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 77. Leider ist die Übersetzung des letzten Verses nicht sehr genau. Homeyer übersetzt zwar das „castis moribus,” übergeht aber das „studii,” meiner Ansicht nach eine nicht zu vergessende Aufforderung, um Roswithas ideales Frauenbild zu vervollständigen.

<sup>26</sup> Die Ehe war zwar angebracht um zu verhindern, ausserhalb dieser Bindung zu sündigen, aber noch wünschenswerter schien, Abstinez selbst innerhalb der Ehe wahren zu können. Vgl. hierzu James A. Brundage, „Better to Marry Than to Burn?: The Case of the Vanishing Dichotomy,” *Views of Women's Lives in Western Tradition*, ed. Frances Keller Richardson (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 195–216; hier 195; James A. Brundage, „Allas! That Evere Love Was Synne: Sex and Medieval Canon Law,” *Catholic Historical Review* 72 (1986): 1–13. Zu *Oswald* und warum dieser heilige König letztendlich eine keusche Ehe führte, obwohl er sich aus dynastischen Gründen zur Ehe entschlossen hatte, siehe Eva Parra Membrives, „Si ist in heidnischu künigin.” *Apuntes sobre el matrimonio intercultural en la épica medieval alemana más temprana*, *Actas de la XI Semana de Estudios Germánicos: Das Fremde im Eigenen: Sprache, Literatur und Kultur des deutschen Sprachraumes aus interkultureller Perspektive: Lo ajeno en lo propio: la lengua, la literatura y la cultura de los países de lengua alemana desde una perspectiva intercultural*, ed. Isabel Hernández, Margit Raders und María Luisa Schilling (Madrid: Del Orto, 2005), 357–72.

<sup>27</sup> Die Hand wird in kaltes Wasser statt ins Feuer getaucht. Eine übliche Variante im Gottesurteil. Dass diese Probe durchgeführt wird, um die sexuelle Schuld der Frauen zu erweisen, war üblich.

Wasser eintauchen. Die hierbei völlig versengte Haut des ganzen Armes der Frau ist zwar eine erstaunliche Züchtigung, kann aber nur als *indirekte* Folge ihres Sexualvergehens angesehen werden. Denn, wie aus dem Text deutlich hervorgeht, Gongolf ist dazu bereit, nach verständlichem, anfänglichem Ärger den Ehebruch, d.h. die sexuelle Schuld seiner Gattin, zu vergeben. Anders jedoch verhält es sich mit der Lüge, die aus der Verneinung ebendieser Sünde hervorgeht. Diese letzte, die Unaufrichtigkeit, ist es dann, die falsche Heuchelei der Unschuld,<sup>28</sup> die schließlich zur physischen Verstümmelung von Gongolfs Ehefrau führt.<sup>29</sup> Über die Affäre selbst wird mehr oder weniger großzügig hinweggesehen: „Et donat miseram veniae miseratus honore, / ultra sed proprio non locat in thalamo“<sup>30</sup> (mit seiner Gattin übt er Nachsicht, / doch wehrt er ihr das Ehelager),<sup>31</sup> die sexuelle Schuld ist verziehen,<sup>32</sup> die Falschheit aber findet keine Gnade.

Bei dem Clericus kann dagegen die später eintretende Strafe einzig als Produkt des Sexualvergehens gesehen werden. In der Legende wird nämlich an keiner Stelle von Roswitha erwähnt, dass Gongolfs Konkurrent zur Rede gestellt wird, oder dass von ihm irgendeine Aussage wegen einer angeblichen Schuld verlangt wird. Die Unschuldssprobe wird einzig von der Frau verlangt, nicht aber von dem Mann, der doch mit ihr gemeinsam gesündigt hat.<sup>33</sup> Der Geistliche wird nicht

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Siehe Peter Dinzelsbacher, *Das fremde Mittelalter: Gottesurteil und Tierprozess* (Essen: Magnus, 2006); Pius Kost, *Gottesurteile im Mittelalter* (Littau: P. Kost, 2003); Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986); Vickie Ziegler, *Trial by Fire and Battle in Medieval German Literature* (Rochester: Camden, 2004); Christine Kasper, *Von miesen Rittern und sündhaften Frauen und solchen, die besser waren: Tugend- und Keuschheitsproben in der mittelalterlichen Literatur vornehmlich des deutschen Sprachraums*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 547 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1995), 23.

<sup>28</sup> Roswitha sagt: „Nil sperans damni possi sibi fieri“ (Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 115) [was sollte ihr dabei geschehen? Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 79]. Es wird also angedeutet, dass Gongolfs Frau daran glaubt, das Gottesurteil ungestraft überstehen zu können. Oder, anders gesagt, dass ihre (natürlich falsche) Unschuld bewiesen wird.

<sup>29</sup> Fast genauso wie im *Tristan* Gottfrieds von Strassburgs wird hier den Worten mehr Glauben geschenkt als dem Indizienbeweis selbst. Isolde kann sich retten, weil sie, trotz ihres eindeutigen Sexualdeliktes, während ihrer Aussage nicht offiziell lügt und Christus, wie der Erzähler betont, sich in solch einer Situation bereitwillig manipulieren lässt. Gongolfs Frau dagegen wird verurteilt, weil ihre Worte nicht der Wahrheit entsprechen. Die Wahrheit ist in beiden Fällen wichtiger als die eheliche Treue.

<sup>30</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 116

<sup>31</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 79

<sup>32</sup> Da Gongolf schon vorher von Keuschheit in der Ehe gesprochen hat, und dies eigentlich Roswithas Ideal ist, kann das Fernbleiben vom Ehebett eigentlich nicht unbedingt als Strafe aufgefasst werden. Auf jeden Fall ist Gongolfs Frau gut davongekommen, wenn man bedenkt, dass das Gesetz unter Umständen sogar die Tötung der Frau erlaubte. Vgl. Rudolf Weigand, *Liebe und Ehe im Mittelalter*. Bibliotheca eruditorum: Internationale Bibliothek der Wissenschaften, 7 (Goldbach: Keip, 1993), 188; Sabine Fischer-Fabian, *Der jüngste Tag: Die deutschen im späten Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Knauer, 1985), 245.

<sup>33</sup> Im *Tristan* ist es ebenfalls Isolde, die sich allein der Probe unterwerfen muss, während ihr

befragt und kommt somit gar nicht erst in die Lage, sich der Lüge schuldig zu machen. In seinem Fall wird die Falschheit also nicht dem sexuellen Vergehen als Sünde hinzugefügt. Einzig wegen seiner Verführung einer ihm vor Gott nicht zugesprochenen Frau wird er seine Strafe erhalten: die Verbannung, ein Urteil, das nur aus einem heutigen Standpunkt milde anmuten darf. Zu Roswithas Zeiten muss der Verlust der heimatlichen Umgebung als ein fast todbringendes Urteil angesehen werden.<sup>34</sup> Die Dichterin selbst versucht mit ergreifenden Versen das erschütternde Los ihrer Figur zu schildern:

Mandans, ut propria damnandus clericus ergo  
Expulsus subito pergeret e patria  
quo sua finetenus mala defleret scelerosus,  
Seclusus patria et datus exilio<sup>35</sup>

[er ließ den Geistlichen zur Strafe  
sogleich verbannen aus der Heimat,  
damit der Schurke im Exile  
endlich die schwere Schuld bereue.]<sup>36</sup>

Die Geschichte wird natürlich weitergeführt, denn Gongolfs Märtyrertum, der eigentliche Anlass der Erzählung, steht noch bevor. Sowohl die beschämte Ehefrau als auch der verbannte Liebhaber kommen noch einmal zusammen, um den letzten Akt ihres Racheplanes auszuführen. Nicht damit zufrieden, Gongolfs Ruf und Ehre in Gefahr gebracht zu haben,<sup>37</sup> trachten beide dem heiligen Manne auch

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Liebhaber Tristan gar nicht vor Gericht zitiert worden ist, so dass sich die Frau alleine und letztendlich mit Hilfe einer List retten kann. Auch hier ist der Mitschuldige anscheinend nicht präsent. So wie Tristans Unschuld mit Isoldes Freispruch bewiesen wurde, so wird hier des Geistlichen Schuld mit der seiner Geliebten bewiesen. Vgl. J. J. Meyer, *Isoldes Gottesurteil in seiner erotischen Bedeutung. Ein Beitrag zur vergleichenden Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin: Hermann Barsdorf Verlag, 1914).

<sup>34</sup> Vgl. *Exile in the Middle Ages: Proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 8-11 July 2002*, ed. Laura Napran und Elizabeth van Houts (Turnhout, Brepols, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 116.

<sup>36</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 79. Anm. des Hg. (A.C.): Ironischerweise hatte er ja eigentlich dies auch schon vorher getan, weil er eine keusche Ehe führen wollte. Er vermochte sie also durch sexuellen Entzug gar nicht zu bestrafen, und man könnte sogar spekulieren, dass er eventuell unter Impotenz leidet, was er durch seine religiösen Argumente zu kaschieren bemüht ist. Natürlich würde dies nur indirekt als Konsequenz einer wohl anachronistischen Interpretation gelten, denn die Dichterin selbst wird kaum an diese Möglichkeit gedacht haben, wie ja auch der Text dafür kein Indiz bietet.

<sup>37</sup> Gongolf empfand besonders den Verlust seines guten Rufes als störend. Vgl.: "Verbula non minimae nuntia maestitiae, / Ingemuit tam triste nefas dignissimus heros, / Angoris magno tangitur et iaculo; / Intus in angusto volvit quoque pectoris antro," Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 115 ("Wie er erkannte, dass schon gedrungen / in jeden Winkel Klatsch und Schande, / erfaßten Schmerz und tiefer Abscheu / vor dem Verbrechen seine Seele," Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 79).

noch nach dessen Leben. Und dies nicht nur aus Rache wegen der schon erhaltenen Demütigung, sondern, wie von Roswitha ausdrücklich unterstrichen, damit beide weiterhin ihr sündhaftes Leben weiterführen können.<sup>38</sup>

Die geplante Mordtat gelingt: Während des Schlafes wird Gongolf meuchlerisch ermordet, und das Paar ist somit frei, sich gänzlich seinen sexuellen Freuden hinzugeben. Letzteres mag auch als Beispiel dafür gelten, dass bei Roswitha voll ausgelebter Sex oft eng mit einem unnatürlichen, gewaltsamen Tode verbunden ist. Dies gilt, wie wir noch sehen werden, sowohl für die normbrechenden Figuren, als auch –wie hier– für Unschuldige, die durch das lustvolle Verlangen anderer indirekt betroffen und geschädigt werden. Sex wird so mit dem Tod identifiziert, einem gewalttätigen, grauenvollen Ende noch dazu, während Keuschheit, Roswithas beliebteste, am meisten geförderte Virtus,<sup>39</sup> dagegen das Leben bedeutet. Einzig die Figuren, die sich gänzlich der geschlechtlichen Liebe enthalten, erfreuen sich einer langen, friedlichen Existenz und erreichen mitunter sogar das Greisenalter, was diese Gleichung Sex=Tod wohl noch verstärken mag.<sup>40</sup>

Kommen wir aber zurück zur Handlung in *Gongolf*. Allzu viel Zeit hat das kriminelle Paar nicht, um frei und ungestört ihre unkeusche Liebeslust auszukosten. Gongolf ist nicht mehr physisch präsent, also übernimmt Gott selbst die Rolle des Richters: Während beide Sünder – erst sexuell aktive Ehebrecher, und nun auch noch Mörder – ihren niedrigen tierischen Trieben nachgehen, ereilt sie schon die göttliche Strafe:

Viscera sed subito profudit caelitus acta  
 pridem laetitia quae fuerant tumida  
 sicque miser, celsa prostratus vindice dextra  
 vita mercatam perdiderat ganeam.<sup>41</sup>

[da barsten schon die Eingeweide,  
 mit denen lustvoll er gesündigt,  
 er sank dahin, plötzlich getroffen,  
 das Leben und die Buhlin lassend.]<sup>42</sup>

Während des Liebesaktes selbst kommt es also zum Tode des Geistlichen. Dass Gott sich gerade diesen Moment intensiver Leidenschaft aussucht, um den

<sup>38</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 115.

<sup>39</sup> Vgl. z.B. u.a. Hugo Kuhn, "Hrotsviths von Gandersheims dichterisches Programm," id., *Dichtung und Welt im Mittelalter*. Kleine Schriften, 1 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1959), 91–104; Parra Membrives, Eva, *Mundos femeninos emancipados: Reconstrucción teórico-empírica de una propuesta literaria femenina en la Edad media alemana* (Zaragoza: Anubar, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Zu dem Diskursthema 'Alter,' siehe jetzt: *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 2 (Berlin und New York: de Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 116

<sup>42</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 81

Machenschaften der Beiden ein Ende zu setzen und nicht z.B. während des Mordes oder unmittelbar danach eingreift, zeugt von einer Vergeltung vor allem des Sexualdeliktes, das die Autorin viel stärker zu stören scheint als das Blutdelikt. Denn, wenn auch Gongolfs Tod von der Vorsehung begrüßt werden sollte, um ihn in die Schar der gemarterten Christen aufzunehmen, hätte Gott doch die (oder den) Verbrecher unmittelbar nach Gongolfs Ende vernichten können. Der Ersatz der Lust durch die Pein zeigt wieder einmal, wie laut Roswitha normbrechender Sex unerlässlich zum Tode führen muss. Dass letzterer sogar noch mitten im sündhaften Akt selbst stattfindet, dass die in der Leidenschaft wirkenden Organe<sup>43</sup> während ihres Gebrauchs gewaltsam bersten, beschreibt deutlich bestraften Sex und nicht bestraften Mord und soll wohl Roswithas Lesern<sup>44</sup> veranschaulichen, wie eng doch Gewalt mit Sex verbunden ist.

In dieser schreckenserfüllten Szene fällt auf, wie passiv sich die Sexualpartnerin des Clericus während des ganzen Prozesses verhält. Seine Organe explodieren während des Liebesaktes, also genau in dem Moment, als er noch mit ihr intensiv beschäftigt sein müsste, aber Roswitha scheint zu vergessen, was für einen Effekt ein derartig blutiges Ende des Sünders bei seiner Partnerin hervorzubringen vermag. So ganz alltäglich mag es ja wohl nicht sein, dass einem der Sexualpartner beim Akt selbst auseinander fällt, und man kann sich wohl vorstellen, dass Gongolfs Witwe wenn nicht einen physischen, zumindest einen psychischen Schaden davongetragen haben muss. Roswitha verschweigt uns dies, benutzt die Szene überhaupt nicht, um auch ihre weibliche Sünderin zu strafen, ja übergeht in dieser Situation die Figur völlig, als wäre sie überhaupt nicht präsent, und lässt sie erst viel später, nach einer erheblichen Zeitlücke,<sup>45</sup> in der Geschichte wieder auftauchen.

Nun, zunächst einmal sollte hier überraschen, dass in dem Augenblick, in dem der sündhafte Geistliche sein Ende findet, die ebenfalls sündhafte Frau heil davonkommt. Nicht nur, dass die physische Nähe der beiden kaum eine unverwundete Frau erwarten ließ, es wundert auch, dass sich die göttliche Vorsehung dazu entschließt, nur einen der Sünder zu bestrafen und den anderen unbehelligt davonkommen zu lassen. Dass der Unbestrafte von beiden auch noch gerade die Frau sein soll, die bei der Kirche seit Zeiten der paradiesischen Eva<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Die Autorin spricht von "visceras," sagt aber auch, dass diese Eingeweide es waren, mit denen er lustvoll gesündigt hat. Roswitha geht davon aus, dass die Lust in den Eingeweiden entsteht.

<sup>44</sup> Ob sich Roswitha erstrangig an die Novizinnen aus Gandersheim oder an männliche Leser richtet, ist nicht ganz geklärt worden. Zwar möchte sie schon musterhafte Lebensweisen vorführen, aber ebenso das negative Frauenbild revidieren. Vgl. Eva Parra Membrives, "Roswithas dichterisches Programm."

<sup>45</sup> Die Autorin benutzt diese Zeitlücke, um über Gongolfs Tod und spätere Wundertaten zu erzählen.

<sup>46</sup> Eva Schirmer, *Mystik und Minne. Frauen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Elefanten Presse, 1984), zeigt



immer als Auslöserin der fleischlichen Lust galt, scheint fast noch unverständlicher.

Gongolfs Frau ist sowohl erwiesene Ehebrecherin als auch Lügnerin und Mörderin. Vor allem die Freuden der Lust, die ja Roswitha so abscheulich findet, hat sie voll ausgekostet. Sie hat sogar derart Gefallen daran gefunden, dass sie nach dem Ableben ihres Liebhabers sofort zur Prostituierten wird, wie das bei Roswithas entjungferten Frauen oft der Fall ist.<sup>47</sup> Die weibliche Sünderin fährt also ungestört mit ihrem Sexualleben fort, ohne dass ihr Tun bei Gott Anstoß zu finden scheint. Dabei wäre es leicht gewesen, das Abscheiden des Clericus dazu zu benutzen, auch bei der Frau irgendwelche Spuren zu hinterlassen, sie in irgendeiner Weise öffentlich zu brandmarken oder sogar zu töten.

Die letztendlich in der Legende eintretende göttliche Bestrafung für diese wiederholte Sünderin wird uns noch den Sinn Roswithas für den Humor zeigen. Als der nun zweifachen Witwe und nun wirklich sexbesessenen Hure nämlich von Wundern berichtet wird, die der hingschiedene Gongolf noch nach seiner Ermordung vollbracht haben soll, macht sich die Mörderin darüber lustig. Voller Verachtung vergleicht sie diese angeblich außergewöhnlichen Taten mit der Klangproduktion ihres Hinterns. Die Verneinung wieder einmal, die Lüge, die Verachtung der Wahrheit, die ihr schon einmal Schaden zugefügt hatte, wird ihr erneut zum Verhängnis, und nicht etwa der Sex. Die erste Strafe, von Gongolf erhalten, war nicht genug, um ihren Hang zur Unwahrheit zu kurieren, die zweite, von Gott erteilte Strafe, soll sie daran erinnern, ihre Schwäche zu korrigieren: von nun an soll immer dann, wenn sie versucht zu sprechen, ein "Wunder" ihrem Hintern entfahren.

Gewiss, Gongolfs Frau findet am Ende der Legende auch ihre Strafe, aber ihr Sexleben wird dadurch nicht eingedämmt, oder zumindest nicht von der Autorin oder gar von Gott zensuriert. Während ihr Partner mitten in seiner Lust stirbt, wird sich Gongolfs Frau in Zukunft gerade der Lust widmen. Warum bei ihm dieses Exempel statuieren und nicht bei ihr? Nur Zufall oder göttliche Absicht?

In der Annahme, dass weder Gott noch Roswitha solch eine wichtige Angelegenheit wie die Bestrafung einer sexuellen Sünde nur auf Geratewohl

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mehrere Beispiele, bei denen laut Aussagen bekannter Geistlicher und Kirchenväter die Frau immer als Auslöser der Lust des Mannes verstanden werden muss, eine Idee, mit der Roswitha nicht übereinstimmt. In ihrem *Pelagius* erzählt sie von homoerotischer Liebe, die Abd-al-Rahmen III. überfällt, als er den jungen Pelagius erblickt. Zwar beruht die ganze Geschichte auf einer historisch sicher überlieferten Begebenheit, so dass wohl kaum eine weibliche Figur einbezogen werden konnte, aber Roswitha hätte auch eine beliebig andere Legende erzählen können, wenn sie sich für das Thema Sex interessierte und mit der traditionellen Auffassung des Ursprungs der Lust einverstanden gewesen wäre.

<sup>47</sup> Siehe die junge Maria in Roswithas beliebtem Drama *Abraham*, die sich nach einer einzigen Verführung so tief gefallen glaubt, dass sie ebenfalls zur Hure wird.

entschieden haben wollten, scheint eine Untersuchung der möglichen Unterschiede zwischen ihrem Sex und seinem Sex, zwischen seiner Art von Sünde und ihrer Art von Sünde, angebracht.

Schon der Anfangspunkt der Beziehung zeigt hier eine auffallende Abweichung von den in der Literatur üblicherweise auftauchenden Verführungsszenen: er überrumpelt sie mit unerlaubten Absichten und nicht sie ihn. Der Clericus selbst wird noch dazu von der Schlange<sup>48</sup> als Vertreterin des Fürsten des Abgrunds verführt, und nicht etwa durch irgendwelche weibliche Machenschaften, ja nicht mal durch die feminine Schönheit. Er sündigt als erster und reißt sie mit, eine perfekte Inversion des paradiesischen Sündenfalles. Die Frau wird hier zur passiven Komplizin, der sündhafte Geistliche dagegen ist der gerissene, listige Auslöser der Sünde, mit dem Teufel eng verbunden und sein direkter Zugang zur Bosheit, diese "Tür des Teufels," von der Tertulian sprach.<sup>49</sup>

Die augenfälligste Differenz aber zwischen dem Geistlichen und seiner Geliebten liegt beim innersten Empfinden ihrer beider Beziehung, die von Roswitha schon adjektivisch völlig ungleich beschrieben wird. Bei ihm sieht die Autorin nämlich Flammen, fleischliche Lust, Sex. Zwar werden all diese vom Teufel provoziert, aber einzig physisch-fleischliche Triebe sind beim Manne präsent: "Scilicet infelix Gongolfi clericus audax / ardebat propriam plus licito dominam"<sup>50</sup> [ein unglückseliger Priester Gongolfs / entbrannt in Leidenschaft zur Herrin].<sup>51</sup>

Welch ein Unterschied nun bei Gongolfs Frau, wo Roswitha Liebe, Herz und Gefühl zu entdecken glaubt:

<sup>48</sup> Die Schlange zeigt eigentlich eine ausgeprägte Vorliebe für die Frau, schon seit paradiesischen Zeiten. Interessant ist hierbei, dass u.a. einige jüdische Sekten davon ausgehen, dass Evas Delikt im Paradies sexueller Natur war und dass sie mit der Schlange gesündigt hatte. Auf die symbolische Gestalt dieses Reptils braucht wohl nicht weiter eingegangen zu werden. Max Kühler, *Schweigen, Schmuck und Schleier: Drei neutestamentliche Vorschriften zur Verdrängung der Frauen auf dem Hintergrund einer frauenfeindlichen Exegese des Alten Testaments im antik Judentum. Novum Testamentum et orbis antiquus*, 1 (Freiburg i. Ü.: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986). Siehe auch Eva Parra Membrives, "Der Teufel und das Weib: El diablo y la mujer en la literatura alemana medieval," unveröffentlicher Vortrag in *El Diablo en La Edad Media. Seminarios de Septiembre* (Sevilla, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> Allerdings tat er dies in Bezug auf die Frau: "Weißt du nicht, dass du eine Eva bist? Es lebt der Richterspruch Gottes über deinem Geschlecht [. . .]. Du bist die Tür des Teufels, du bist die Entsieglerin jenes Baumes, du hast zuerst das göttliche Gesetz im Stch gelassen, du hast jenen überredet, den zu überreden der Teufel nicht die Macht hatte: du hast das Bild Gottes, den Menschen, so leichtfertig zerschlagen. Wegen dessen, was du verschuldet hast, musste sogar der Gottessohn sterben," Eva Schirmer, *Mystik und Minne*, 28. Vgl ebenfalls Eva Parra Membrives, "Criminalidad y perfidia femenina: El mal y la mujer en autores y autoras del Medioevo alemán," *Las mujeres y el mal*, ed. Miriam Palma y Eva Parra Membrives (Sevilla: Padilla 2002), 187–208.

<sup>50</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 113.

<sup>51</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 79.

Pro dolor! Haec, male victa dolo serpentis amaro  
 infelix citius aestuat in facinus  
 inhaerens servo cordisque calore secreto  
 lagalem dominum respuit ob famulum."<sup>52</sup>

[Und ach! Verblendet gab die Ärmste  
 der sündigen Versuchung nach,  
 sie hing ihr Herz an jenen Burschen  
 und ward dem eigenen Gatten untreu.]<sup>53</sup>

Natürlich gibt sich Gongolfs Frau ebenfalls dem Sex hin. Bei ihr handelt es sich aber um eine der Liebe entsprungenen Lust, ganz so, als ob diese Frau Walthers von der Vogelweides später formulierte Idee<sup>54</sup> von einer voll ausgelebten Liebe teilen würde. Die Frau fühlt mir ihrem Herzen und nicht mit den Eingeweiden, um auf Roswithas Bild zurückzugreifen, deswegen werden diese letzten bei ihr auch von Gott verschont. Man könnte also sagen, dass es sich bei Gongolfs Clericus allein um Lust ohne Liebe handelt, bei der Frau um aus der Liebe entsprungenen Lust. Könnte nicht aus diesem Grund der einen verziehen, der andere tödlich bestraft werden? Um dies zu bestätigen, betrachten wir uns noch kurz ein weiteres, ähnlich gestaltetes Beispiel.

Eine ebenfalls in diesem Kontext relevante Legende ist *Basilius*, entstanden nach 962, also in einer zweiten Phase von Roswithas Schreiben.<sup>55</sup> *Basilius* zeigt schon größere thematische Unabhängigkeit von der Kirchendoktrin, zumindest was das Frauenbild betrifft.<sup>56</sup> Die in diesem Fall einer griechischen<sup>57</sup> Legende

<sup>52</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 113

<sup>53</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 77–8.

<sup>54</sup> Im Gegensatz etwa zu Reinmar von Hagenau, der eine distanzierte, platonische Liebe verteidigte, in der der Schmerz die wichtigste Emotion war, also eine Beziehung, die außerdem ein fast feudalistisches Verhältnis reproduzierte, plädierte der jüngere Walther von der Vogelweide für eine gegenseitige, erfüllte Liebe, bei der Sex ein wichtiger Bestandteil sein konnte. In seinem Gedicht "Saget mir ieman 'Waz ist minne'," erklärt Walther so, dass "minne ist minne, tuot si wol," und "minne ist zweier herzen wünne, / teilent sie geliche, sô ist diu Minne dâ" (Ingrid Kasten, *Deutsche Lyrik des frühen und hohen Mittelalters* (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1995), 438. In seinem Lied "Unter der linden" berichtet Walther bekanntermaßen von einer idyllischen Liebesbeziehung, bei der von erfülltem Sex die Rede zu sein scheint, und die von ihm gänzlich unterstützt wird. Vgl. Albrecht Classen, "'Mit Worten, und mit Werken ouch' (L. 24, 6). Sprachliche Sinnbestimmung bei Walther von der Vogelweide," *Studi Medievali*, Serie Terza, XXXVII (1996; erschien 1997), 671–702. Obwohl Roswitha natürlich eine keusche Ehe vorzieht, scheint sie mit Liebe verbundenen Sex, wie er von der Frau ausgelebt wird, als nicht so strafbar zu empfinden.

<sup>55</sup> Über die zweite Phase ist sich die Forschung einig, da Roswitha es für angebracht hält, eine erneute Einführung zu schreiben. Das Datum setzt wieder Fidel Rädle, *Hrotsvit von Gandersheim*, 85, ein.

<sup>56</sup> Vgl. Eva Parra Membrives, "Roswithas dichterisches Programm." Ich versuche dort, eine

entstammende Geschichte ähnelt *Gongolf* in ihrem thematischen Aufbau sehr, obwohl hier Roswithas literarische Programm der Frauenverteidigung schon daran deutlich wird, dass die immer noch namenlose weibliche Figur sich langsam aber unaufhaltsam in den Vordergrund zu rücken weiß. Der Heilige Basilius ist zwar weiterhin die dominante, Gott zugewandte Figur und wird auch zum Titelhelden der Legende befördert, aber man kann von ihm trotzdem wohl kaum als dem einzigen Protagonisten der Legende sprechen. Alle wichtigen Begebnisse der Geschichte werden, wie schon Martos festgestellt hat, von der Frau entweder verursacht oder eingeleitet: “Destaca la imagen de la mujer, que es causa involuntaria de perdición y motor de la conversión: tanto en el enamoramiento como en la decisión de salvarse, ella se muestra más fuerte que su compañero.”<sup>58</sup>

Die Tugend der Frau verursacht zunächst einmal den Neid der Schlange, die ihre Verführung versucht. Interessant ist, dass die Schlange erneut, wie in *Gongolf*, einen Mann als Komplizen wählt, und nicht eine Frau. Zwar hätte der Teufel in Schlangengestalt auch versuchen können, das tugendhafte Mädchen direkt zu verführen, um eine paradiesähnliche Situation zu gestalten, aber Roswitha hält sich doch viel lieber an das umgekehrte, in *Gongolf* schon erprobte Muster. Wieder einmal ist es auch ein sozial Untergebener,<sup>59</sup> dem die Schlange ein lustvolles Verlangen zu einer höher stehenden Frau einflößt. Das begehrte Mädchen ist in diesem Fall noch nicht einmal verheiratet, aber von ihrem Vater mit großer Hoffnung dazu auserwählt, ihre Viginität zu bewahren. Die Parallelen zu *Gongolf* ergeben sich sofort, wenn wir an *Gongolfs* Aufruf zur Keuschheit denken. In beiden Fällen wird die Keuschheit der Frau von einem für sie verantwortlichen Manne – in einem Fall der Ehemann, im anderen, der Vater- entschieden, und nicht etwa von der Frau selbst. Dies mag später als Entschuldigung gelten, wenn die Frau diese Keuschheit nicht bewahrt. Da sie nicht selbst den Entschluß gefasst haben, Abstinenz zu üben, wird wohl ihre Schuld geringer sein, als wenn sie auch noch wortbrüchig geworden wären.

In dieser zweiten Legende kommt es aber zu keinem Ehebruch, sondern zu einer Ehe, an der es im Prinzip als Institution ja nicht viel zu kritisieren gibt. Die Ehe ist auch nicht unbedingt an Sex gekoppelt. Roswitha selbst beschreibt des öfteren keusch geführte Ehen. Natürlich wissen wir bereits, dass eine von der Schlange strategisch eingefädelte Beziehung keinesfalls ohne Sex bleiben wird.

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gedankliche Evolution in Roswithas Schrifttum zu beweisen, zumindest was ihre Verteidigung der Frauen betrifft.

<sup>57</sup> Rosvita de Gandersheim, *Obras completas*, hg. und übers. von Juan Martos und Rosario Moreno Soldevila (Huelva: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Huelva, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Juan Martos, *Rosvita de Gandersheim*, XXV.

<sup>59</sup> Diesmal geht nicht genau aus der Legende hervor, ob es sich um einen Diener oder gar einen Sklaven handelt, was die Situation natürlich noch komplizierter machen würde.

Der vom Vater leidenschaftlich gegen die Ehe geleistete Widerstand darf nicht verwundern, denn soziale Gründe kommen ja auch mit ins Spiel, obwohl es ihn anscheinend weniger stört, dass seine Tochter einen Untergebenen liebt, als dass sie sich für ein aktives Sexualeben entscheidet. Der Akzent wird viel stärker auf die verlorene Tugend gesetzt als auf den Standesunterschied:

His pater auditis lacrimis dicebat amaris:  
 Heu, heu, quid pateris veluti spes unica patris?  
 Dic, rogo, quis verbis te decepit male blandis  
 Vel quis blandior circumvenit simulatis?  
 Nonne, tibi patriam reddi cupiendo supernam  
 Sponso caelesti Christo te denique vovi  
 Hunc casta solum coleres quo mente per aevum  
 Illius et laudes cum caelicolis resonares  
 Addita virgineis mortis post vincula turmis:  
 Et tu lascivi fervescis amore famelli  
 And nunc submissa, soboles mea, voce rogabo  
 Finem stultitiae pergas ut reddere tantae,  
 Ne genus omne tuum male confundas generosum.  
 Si tamen incepto temptas durare maligno  
 Turpiter absque mora peries, dulcissima proles!<sup>60</sup>

[Der Vater weinte bittre Zähren:  
 "Mein armes Kind, du meine Hoffnung,  
 o sag', wer hat dein Herz betrogen?  
 Wem bist du nur ins Netz gegangen?  
 Dem Himmel wollte ich dich schenken,  
 Ersah dir Christus als Verlobten,  
 Damit du ewig ihn verehrtest,  
 Ihn mit der Engelschar lobpriesest  
 Nach deinem Tod im Kreis der Jungfrauen.  
 Doch du liebst einen meiner Knechte!  
 Mein Kind lass dich von mir beschwören:  
 Sieh ab von dieser großen Torheit,  
 Halt rein dein edles Blut von Schande!  
 Pochst du jedoch auf deinen Willen,  
 Wirst elend du zugrundegehen.]<sup>61</sup>

Den Vater stört es, dass seine Tochter einen Knecht liebt,<sup>62</sup> aber über viele Verse hinweg widmet er sich allein dem Verlust ihrer Jungfernschaft, was ihn wohl am meisten zur Verzweiflung treibt. Ob die Torheit des Mädchens und die Schande,

<sup>60</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotzvithae Opera*, 181.

<sup>61</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 115.

<sup>62</sup> Es muss auch dieses "liebt" in Homeyers Übersetzung beachtet werden.

die von dem Vater befürchtet werden, wegen des Standesunterschiedes, durch den Verlust ihrer Virginität, oder gar beides zusammen entstehen, kann den eben zitierten Worten des Vaters zwar nicht genau entnommen werden, aber die Gleichung Sex= Tod ist erneut in der Formulierung "wirst elend du zugrundegehen" aus dem letzten zitierten Vers präsent.<sup>63</sup>

Wieder einmal ist es die Frau, die den Fortgang der Geschichte entscheidet. Nach einer Selbstmorddrohung willigt der Vater in die Ehe ein, wahrscheinlich um einer noch schlimmeren Sünde vorzubeugen. Denn eine Ehe mit Sex ist zwar verwerflich, ein Selbstmord aber unverzeihbar und würde des Mädchens Chancen auf das zukünftige himmlische Leben drastisch verringern.<sup>64</sup> Dass der Vater dem frisch angetrauten Paar auch noch sein Vermögen überlässt, könnten wir mit einem völligen Sieg der Frau interpretieren, die ihren Willen durchgesetzt, und außer ihrer Keuschheit keinerlei Verlust erlitten hat, nicht einmal einen sozial-ökonomischen. Sie macht sich aber dennoch eines sündigen Verhaltens schuldig. Denn zwar entsteht bei ihr das Verlangen nach Sex nicht durch teuflisches Zuflüstern, aber schon ein unreines Denken – und das ist ja wohl bei ihr der Fall – kann als sündhaft aufgefaßt werden, ganz abgesehen davon, dass sie ihren Vater manipuliert, sogar erpresst, damit er ihre Ehe zulässt. Sündenlos, wie Roswitha es sieht, ist die Frau mithin auf keinen Fall.

Die Ehe wird geschlossen, und so kommt es, wie notwendigerweise angenommen werden muss, zur physischen 'Unreinheit' der Frau. Roswitha übergeht diesen Aspekt der Ehe schweigend und erzählt überhaupt nichts von dem aktiven Sexualleben der beiden Angetrauten: eine Besessenheit wie bei *Gongolf* ist hier überhaupt nicht zu verspüren. *Gongolfs* Gattin und diese Frau sind auch ganz verschiedene weibliche Figuren, wie sich ja hier Roswithas Frauenfreundlichkeit schon zu erkennen gibt. Das Mädchen sündigt, wird von einem Knecht betört, erpresst ihren Vater, ist zum Selbstmord bereit, aber trotzdem sind ihre Vergehen mit der sexbessenen Ehebrecherin und Mörderin nicht zu vergleichen.

Es ist in *Basilius* später erneut die weibliche Figur, die das Fortschreiten der Legende bestimmt. War es damals *Gongolf*, der seine Frau vor ein Gottesurteil stellte, so ist es nun die verheiratete, namenlose Frau, die ihren Mann zwingt, sich Gott zu stellen. Wie auch in *Gongolf* gehen in *Basilius* Gerüchte um, die in diesem Fall das Fernbleiben des Mannes vom Gottesdienst ans Licht kommen lassen. Dass ihr Ehemann kein gläubiger Christ sein könnte, war der Frau bis dahin gar nicht in den Sinn gekommen. In dem Versuch, über die Schuld oder Unschuld ihres

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<sup>63</sup> Für entsprechende spätmittelalterliche Belege siehe dazu den Beitrag von Kathleen M. Llewellyn zu diesem Band.

<sup>64</sup> Vgl. dazu Albrecht Classen, "Desperate Lovers, Suicidal and Murderous: Early Modern Dawn Songs and Ballads," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 100, 2 (1999): 207–26.

Gatten Klarheit zu erhalten, zwingt *sie ihn*, was wohl für ein motivisches Novum angesehen werden darf, *seine* Reinheit zu beweisen.<sup>65</sup> Wie auch seinerzeit Gongolfs Frau, versucht es hier der natürlich schuldige Sünder zunächst mit der Lüge, wird aber nach dem Insistieren des Mädchens durch eine von Gott gutgeheiene Probe,<sup>66</sup> in diesem Fall den viel weniger gefhrlichen Messegang, schnell berfhrt, so dass er seine Schuld gestehen muss.

Und erneut bestimmt die Frau, was zu geschehen hat. Nach der Beichte ihres Ehepartners, weit sie sofort, was zu tun ist. Dem *verlegenen* Erec in Hartmanns von Aue eponymischen Versroman hnlich,<sup>67</sup> wird sie von keinerlei Zweifel geqult, es gibt kein Zgern. Dass sie in einer sndhaften Situation nicht weiterleben kann und darf, ist ihr sofort klar. Verzweifelt und sich ihrer weiblichen Handlungsbegrenztheit bewut, sucht sie mnnliche Hilfe, diesmal beim Heiligen Basilius, der von nun an die Fhrung in der Legende bernehmen wird:

Illaque, mollitiem iam deponens muliebrem  
et sumens vires prudenti corde viriles,  
mox ad Basilium currebat namque beatum.<sup>68</sup>

[Da tat sie ab die Weibesschwachheit,  
rstete sich mit Kraft und Klugheit  
und suchte eilends auf Basilius]<sup>69</sup>

Interessant ist hier wieder einmal die Wortwahl Roswithas, die bei der sofort richtig handelnden Frau "Kraft und Klugheit" entdeckt und vor allem den Wunsch, der vorher nicht erkannten Snde zu entkommen. Das Mdchen war bereit, ihre Keuschheit aufzugeben, aber nur im Rahmen der Ehe, und dies, weil sie ihren Mann fr einen Christ hielt. Sie war bereit, sich dem Sex hinzugeben, aber nicht der Snde: weder Sex auerhalb der Ehe, noch unreiner Sex mit einem

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<sup>65</sup> Dass normalerweise nur die Reinheit der Frau bewiesen werden muss, ist hier schon an anderer Stelle kommentiert worden.

<sup>66</sup> Martos, *Rosvita von Gandersheim*, XXV, spricht hier ebenfalls vom Ordal, da es sich um eine Probe handelt, die indirekt von Gott entschieden wird. Sollte der Gatte kein Christ sein, knnte er am Gottesdienst nicht teilnehmen. Mit dieser Idee bin ich nur bedingt einverstanden, da die Probe vllig anders angelegt ist als die Feuer- oder Wasserproben, von denen schon die Rede war. Die Gefahr fr den Snder ist nur bedingt. Die Probe wird auerdem in einer privaten Sphre und nicht ffentlich veranstaltet. Nicht zu leugnen ist allerdings die Tatsache, dass die Ehefrau von ihrem Mann die Unschuldprobe verlangt. Dass dies nicht ffentlich geschieht, kann damit erklrt werden, dass die sozialen Strukturen eine solche Art von Forderung (Frau an Mann) nicht erlaubten.

<sup>67</sup> Erec widmet sich ebenfalls vollauf dem Sex in seiner Ehe und vergisst all seine Pflichten als Knig und Ritter. Sobald er aber aus Enites Mund die umgehenden Gerchte hrt und sich seiner Schande bewusst ist, steht er auf und handelt. Die Ehefrau in *Basilius* weist ein sehr hnliches Verhalten auf.

<sup>68</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotzvithae Opera*, 183.

<sup>69</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 115.

nicht christlichen Mann können von ihr akzeptiert werden. Keine nur fleischliche Lust also, nur eine mehr oder weniger reine, zumindest akzeptable Beziehung kommt für sie in Frage. Dass hier Basilius, der Heilige, beigezogen wird und das Mädchen nicht selbst für ihres Gatten Sühne sorgt, muss damit erklärt werden, dass diese Legende in einem frühen Stadium von Roswithas Schrifttum entstanden ist. Spätere Heldinnen schaffen es, ihre Probleme selbst zu lösen und ohne männliches Einwirken<sup>70</sup> zurechtzukommen. In diesem Fall erkennt Roswitha zwar die Kraft, die in der Frau steckt, aber trotzdem wagt die Dichterin noch nicht, ihre weibliche Figur eigenständig handeln zu lassen. Die Bekehrung eines Mannes durch das Eingreifen einer Frau ist ihr noch ein zu gewagtes Thema, weswegen ein Experte, in diesem Fall, Basilius, hinzugezogen werden muss, um alles glaubwürdig erscheinen zu lassen.

Roswitha kommt in *Basilius* viel rascher zum Ende als in *Gongolf*, vielleicht, weil die von ihr beschriebenen Figuren viel schneller ihre Fehler begreifen. Für von Grund auf schlecht kann man eigentlich keine von den beiden Paaren halten – selbst wenn es in *Gongolf* zum Mord kommt –, denn in erster Linie werden sie ja von der Schlange dazu verführt, sündhaft zu handeln. Ein markanter Unterschied zwischen beiden Legenden lässt sich darin finden, dass die Sexbesessenheit der ersten beiden ihre Bußfähigkeit ausschließt, während die größere Neutralität des zweiten Paares in diesem Feld eine Wiedergutmachung des Teufelspaktes ermöglicht. Man könnte sich hier fragen, ob es für den Clericus und seine Geliebte nicht ebenfalls zur Rettung hätte kommen können, wenn sie nicht durch den zum Tode führenden Sex,<sup>71</sup> dem sie sich allzu heftig widmeten, davon abgehalten worden wären.<sup>72</sup>

Sobald Basilius in die Legende eintritt, wird der frühere Knecht gerettet, zunächst einmal wegen seiner Bereitschaft, selbst sein Vergehen zu sühnen, später durch das direkte Einwirken des Basilius, der sogar physisch für die Seele des ehemaligen Sünders kämpft. Was am Ende mit der Ehe des Knechtes geschieht, verschweigt die Geschichte, nur auf die Rettung seiner Seele kommt es Roswitha an. Auch wie das Leben der Frau weitergeht, nachdem sie ihren Fall in Basilius' Hände gelegt hat, wird nicht mehr erörtert.

Sicher ist hier die Schuld des Mannes weit größer als die der Frau, die ja keinen Teufelspakt unterzeichnet, auch nicht mordet oder ein ehebrecherisches Benehmen zeigt. Dass ihr Handeln aber auch nicht ganz sündenfrei war, ist schon gezeigt worden. Die Lust hatte auch sie befallen, der Wunsch, einen Knecht zu heiraten, ist ganz eindeutig geäußert worden. Gegen den Widerstand ihres Vaters verzichtet

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<sup>70</sup> Siehe z.B. Drusiana oder Agnes. Vgl. Eva Parra Membrives, "Roswithas dichterisches Programm..

<sup>71</sup> Ihre Sexbesessenheit führt zu ihrem eigenen, und auch zu Gongolfs Tode.

<sup>72</sup> Genauso begreift später Erec in Hartmanns Versroman, daß seine Sexobsession ihn zum sozialen Tod geführt hat.



sie auf die Keuschheit und macht sich des Ungehorsams schuldig, sie zwingt ihren Vater zur Einwilligung in die Ehe und spielt sogar mit Selbstmordgedanken. Sicher, ihre Sünden sind bei weitem nicht so schwerwiegend wie die ihres Ehemannes, auch weiß sie richtig zu handeln, wenn es darauf ankommt, und sie verhilft ihrem Ehepartner zur Rettung, aber ist dies genug um sie völlig unbestraft davonkommen zu lassen? Wenn auch ihr Mann eine höhere Strafe verdient, müsste sie eigentlich nicht auch ihr Vergehen bereuen und sühnen?

Bei genauerer Betrachtung des Textes stellt sich nun heraus, das dies doch der Fall ist, denn sie klagt:

Heu, heu, splendorem diei cur nata recepi,  
vel cur continuo non sum concessa sepulchro,  
infelix foveam caderem ne mortis in atram!<sup>73</sup>

[Ach, hätt' ich nie das Licht gesehen,  
wär' mir ein ewig Grab beschieden,  
dass ich entginge dem Verderben!]<sup>74</sup>

Aber die Sühne, d.h. die freiwillig angenommene Bestrafung für das eingestandene Vergehen, bleibt aus, denn Roswitha widmet sich ganz der Bestrafung des Mannes, während die Frau völlig ungestraft davonkommt.

Roswitha überlegt immer genau, welche Schritte sie ihre Figuren machen lässt, und überlässt kaum etwas dem Zufall, wie schon verschiedene Untersuchungen bewiesen haben.<sup>75</sup> Hier von einem "Versehen" zu sprechen, von einer Roswitha, die einfach vergisst, ihre weibliche Figur zu bestrafen, die es für unwichtig hält, sich weiterhin mit dieser Frau zu beschäftigen, scheint mir wenig glaubhaft,<sup>76</sup> denn Roswitha beweist sich als viel zu planend in ihrem literarischen Vorgehen, als dass sie einen solchen Flüchtigkeitsfehler begehen würde. Sie hat tatsächlich nicht unterlassen, selbst in diesem Fall einen gefühlsmäßigen Unterschied zwischen Mann und Frau zu schildern. Diese Nuance, die schon im *Gongolf* auffiel, macht sich auch hier wieder bemerkbar:

Ipsius proprium fecit ferverescere servum  
in supra dictae dementer amore puellae.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 182.

<sup>74</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 115.

<sup>75</sup> Hugo Kuhn, "Roswithas dichterisches Programm," 91–104; Eva Parra Membrives, "Roswithas dichterisches Programm" (im Druck).

<sup>76</sup> Vor allem, wenn wir ihre Absicht bedenken, über starke Frauen zu sprechen, scheint dies wenig glaubwürdig. So wie der Gatte seine Schuld eingesteht und zur Sühne bereit ist, müsste auch eine starke Frau ihre Schuld tapfer aussühnen.

<sup>77</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotsvithae Opera*, 178.

[drum ließ er des Proterius Diener  
in Leidenschaft erglühn zur Tochter.]<sup>78</sup>

Brennende Leidenschaft befällt den künftigen Ehemann. Dass hier die Lust an erster Stelle erwähnt wird, springt ins Auge. Bei der Frau dagegen ist nur von der im Herzen entfachten Liebe die Rede:

Iam miserere tuae, genitor dulcissime, natae  
et citius meme iuveni, quem diligo, trade  
ne moriar, tristis languens per taedia cordis.<sup>79</sup>

[Erbarm dich, Teurer, Deiner Tochter  
und gib mich bald dem liebsten Jüngling,  
ich sterbe sonst vor Herzenskummer.]<sup>80</sup>

Sicher, in beiden Fällen geht es um Sex, denn die Frau muß bei ihrem Vater dafür kämpfen, ihre Virginität aufgeben zu dürfen. Dass er aber brennt, während sie liebt, läßt Roswitha ihren LeserInnen klar vor Augen treten. Der Sex ist hier bei der Frau sogar einfach eine Folge der Ehe, ohne dass das Mädchen an irgendeiner Stelle ihr spezielles Interesse an derartigen Aktivitäten äußerte. Sogar die fehlenden Beschreibungen des Sexuallebens des Paares, sobald sie die Ehe eingegangen sind, können damit erklärt werden, dass die Frau sich überhaupt nicht oder nur wenig für Sex interessiert. Lust, Leidenschaft oder brennende Gefühle besitzen bei ihr keine zentrale Rolle. Liebe ohne Lust fast also, und somit quasi eine Garantie für die ausbleibende Bestrafung für ihre zwar geringeren, dennoch eindeutigen Vergehen.

Aber ein Blick auf die Liebe des Knechtes bringt uns noch eine weitere Überraschung, denn, obwohl der Mann in Leidenschaft entbrannt ist und sicherlich auf Sex aus ist, erzählt uns Roswitha, wie sehr er in seinem Herz leidet: "Nec audet nudare novum cordis cruciatum"<sup>81</sup> [auch musste er den Schmerz verschweigen].<sup>82</sup>

Das Einbeziehen des Herzens in diesem Falle ist wohl wahrscheinlich der wichtigste Unterschied zu *Gongolfs Clericus*. Dort liebte man mit den Eingeweiden, hier ebenfalls leidenschaftlich, aber mit dem Herzen. Wenn in *Gongolf* die Strafe in grausame Höhen eskalierte, schwächt sie sich im *Basilius* stark ab, und im Bereich der Sexualität findet sich dafür die Ursache:

In der ersten Legende präsentiert Roswitha einen Mann, der nur Lust und keine Liebe fühlt, in dessen Eingeweiden seine Gefühle situiert sind, und der

<sup>78</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 113.

<sup>79</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotzviðhae Opera*, 178.

<sup>80</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 114.

<sup>81</sup> Helene Homeyer, *Hrotzviðhae Opera*, 178.

<sup>82</sup> Roswitha von Gandersheim, *Werke*, 113.

dementsprechend auch ein grausames Ende findet. Die mit ihm verbundene Frau, zwar Lustgefühle verspürend, aber diese mit Liebe verbindend, wird kaum oder nur wenig bestraft.

In der zweiten Legende übernimmt der Mann die Rolle von *Gongolfs* Frau: ebenfalls von starker Leidenschaft befallen, zeigt er zwar Interesse an Sex, aber seiner Lust mangelt es nicht an Liebe, auch sein Herz wird von seinen Gefühlen erfüllt. Die Strafe, die Roswitha ihm zuweist, ist zwar streng, aber mit der des Clericus nicht zu vergleichen, und letztendlich rettet sich der frühere Knecht sogar. Seine Ehefrau, bei der von Leidenschaft nicht gesprochen werden kann, die nur Liebe und kaum Lust verspürt, kommt dagegen ungestraft davon. Interessant ist dabei auch, dass sich Männer in beiden Fällen in Bezug auf Sex viel strafbarer machen als Frauen, denn bei Männern ist der Sexualtrieb jeweils – in beiden untersuchten Fällen – stärker. Erneut ein Zeichen von Roswithas Frauenfreundlichkeit. Frauen werden von Männern verführt, Frauen sündigen weitaus weniger, Frauen verspüren eine geringere Lust.

Deutlich wird hier auch, dass Roswitha den Sex unterschiedlich beurteilt, je nachdem, ob sich mit der Lust Liebe verbinden lässt oder eben gerade nicht. Lust ohne Liebe (Beispiel: *Gongolfs* Clericus) ist eines der schlimmsten Vergehen überhaupt, kann zur Besessenheit führen, selbst zum Mord, ist also unverzeihlich und muss streng bestraft werden. Die Gleichung Sex = Tod kommt in dieser Verbindung voll zur Geltung, wobei der Tod auch die Nebenfiguren treffen kann. Mit Liebe verbundener Sex (Beispiele: *Gongolfs* Frau, der Knecht in *Basilius*) ist immer noch sündhaft, kann aber ausgesöhnt werden, und erfordert nur eine mildere Strafe. Kein explizites Interesse an Sex, aber vorhandene Liebe (Beispiel: die Frau in *Basilius*), lässt andere ebenfalls begangene Sünden geringer erscheinen, was zur Straflosigkeit führen kann.

Der für Roswitha immer gefährliche Sex, der sogar in der Ehe vermieden werden sollte, wird so durch die Liebe abgeschwächt, und scheint in dieser Verbindung längst nicht so verabscheuungswürdig zu sein. Wenn aus Liebe sexuell gesündigt wird, zeigt Roswitha Verständnis, selbst wenn mit der Lust noch andere Vergehen verbunden sind: der Ursprung einer Gefühlsregung im Herzen ist bei ihr das Wichtigste. Es ist die Liebe also, die ihre Figuren rettet.

Roswithas Abneigung gegen die Lust ohne Liebe ist in diesen beiden Beispielen klar zur Geltung gekommen. Noch wichtiger aber scheint mir hier die rettende Rolle, die die Dichterin, eigentlich ganz im christlichen Sinne, der Liebe zukommen lässt: ganz gleich wie schwer die begangenen Sünden gewesen sind, wenn Liebe mit im Spiel war, lässt sich alles sühnen. Ihre mit verschiedenen Sexualvergehen durchtränkten Texte sollen also nicht so sehr mahnen, wozu die Sünde führen kann, sondern daran erinnern, was die Liebe vermag. Einzig ein (Sexual)Leben ohne Liebe ist für Roswitha unverzeihbar.

Ohne Liebe muss die Lust einfach zur Verderbnis führen. Da Frauen aber in diesen Texten mehr lieben und weniger Lust verspüren, werden sie von Roswitha weniger streng bestraft. Die von der Dichterin auferlegten Strafen haben so nur eine indirekte Verbindung mit dem Gender ihrer Figuren: nicht weil sie Frauen sind und Roswitha eine besondere Sympathie für Frauen hegt, werden sie milder oder gar nicht bestraft, sondern weil ihre Kapazität zu lieben offensichtlich größer ist, als die der mit ihnen jeweils lebenden Männer. Ob Roswithas Frauen im allgemeinen, und auch außerhalb der beiden untersuchten Beispiele, weitaus mehr lieben als Männer kann hieraus nicht unbedingt gefolgert werden, aber wäre sicherlich einer weiteren Untersuchung wert.



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## Sex and Fertility in Marie de France's *Lais*

In medieval courtly literature, it is commonplace for men and women to engage in sexual relations without conceiving children. One has only to think of the best-known literary lovers and marriages of the era (Tristan and Iseut, Lancelot and Guenivere, Guenivere and Arthur, Iseut and Mark) to realize that childless sex is a firmly established feature of courtly love tales. In this regard, Marie de France's *Lais* stand out as an exception. As in real life, sex actually does sometimes lead to pregnancy and children in Marie's tales of courtly love. The world depicted by Marie in her translation of twelve Breton lays, populated by werewolves, fairies, and shape-shifting knights, often seems more magical than realistic. Yet by not evading the natural connection between sex and child-bearing, the author brings to her work a realistic touch often missing from the work of her contemporaries.

The cause-and-effect relationship between sex and children is not always observed in the *Lais*, however, and sex has import well beyond that of child-bearing. The connotations of sex in Marie's work are extremely diverse and often contradictory. Sexuality ranges from the monogamy imposed by elderly husbands on their young wives, to adulterous love affairs (both courtly and uncourtly, fertile and infertile), to abstinence. Readers of the *Lais* cannot help but wonder what makes certain instances of adulterous sex "vileinie" (*Eliduc*, v. 576), and others worthy of approval.<sup>1</sup> In all cases, however, it is clear that sexuality is profoundly expressive of the characters' deepest motivations.

In this study, I will examine the representation of sex in the eight *lais* in which sexual relationships are clearly present. Where relevant, I will also analyze each lay's representation of fertility, mainly through depictions of pregnancy and childbirth. Lastly, I will draw some conclusions on the structural patterns

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<sup>1</sup> All citations refer to Jean Rychner, ed., *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1973). English translations are from *The Lais of Marie de France*, transl. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1982). Where noted, I have adapted Hanning's and Ferrante's translation to clarify the text's literal meaning.

suggested by my study. Scholarship on Marie de France and the *Lais* is abundant, and many of the issues I will raise here have already been touched upon by scholars, most often tangentially. The main contribution of this study to the field is double: 1) it asks, in specific and limited fashion and, to my knowledge, for the first time the question of how the sexual act and sexual fertility function in the *Lais* as a whole; and 2) it attempts to assemble the scholarship which touches disparately and most often indirectly on this question.

A note on terminology: the definitions of the words *sex*, *sexuality*, and *fertility* are flexible and may be called upon to designate a variety of ideas, as the current volume demonstrates.<sup>2</sup> For clarity, I have attempted to limit my use of all three words to their most basic meaning in this study. *Sex* is easiest to define and refers here to sexual intercourse. *Sexuality* is more abstract, but generally designates those aspects of the human person which relate to matters of sex, whether sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual expression. I do not use *sexuality* to refer to questions of gender identity in the present study. *Fertility* refers to the conception and creation of children that result from sexual intercourse, except where noted.<sup>3</sup>

In the courtly literature of twelfth-century France, sexual relations are not usually represented explicitly. Nonetheless, their presence can be inferred with reasonable certainty in most cases, either from some concrete result (such as pregnancy) or from the use of discrete signal phrases such as “ensemble gisent” (“they lie down together”, *Guigemar*, v. 531), “sun cors li otria” (“[she] granted him possession of her body”, *Equitan*, v. 180), or “ensemble funt joie mult grant” (“they gave each other great joy”, *Yonec*, v. 271). Of the twelve *Lais*, seven contain clear references to sexual relations (*Guigemar*, *Equitan*, *Fresne*, *Bisclavret*, *Lanval*, *Yonec*, *Milun*). One more—*Chievrefoil*—recounts one brief reunion of the famous lovers Tristan and Iseut, whose sexual familiarity with one another is beyond doubt although it is not certain whether they engage in relations in this particular episode. Eight *lais* out of twelve, therefore, include sexual relations either explicitly or implicitly.

Of these eight sexual relationships, four result in children (*Fresne*, *Bisclavret*, *Yonec*, *Milun*) and four do not (*Guigemar*, *Equitan*, *Lanval*, *Chievrefoil*). Thus, four *lais* openly portray neither sex nor sexual fertility (*Deus Amanz*, *Laustic*, *Chaitivel*,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. “Some Reflections on Terminology,” in Albrecht’s Classen’s “Introduction” to the current volume.

<sup>3</sup> For a general study of sexuality in the Middle Ages, cf. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, ed., *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996). Laurie A. Finke’s “Sexuality in Medieval French Literature,” Chapter 16 of the *Handbook*, offers a useful summary of the theoretical debates surrounding sexuality in medieval French literature (Bullough and Brundage, 345–68). Cf. also James A. Brundage’s *Law, Sex, and Christian Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) regarding the church’s regulation of sexuality in the Middle Ages.

*Eliduc*).<sup>4</sup> In this way, Marie's collection divides cleanly into thirds when considered from the vantage point of sex and fertility, with one-third portraying neither sex nor child-bearing, one-third sex without child-bearing, and one-third both sex and child-bearing. While one cannot plausibly argue for this division being purposeful, it does indicate Marie's even-handed treatment of these matters.

In general terms and as previously noted, sex takes on a variety of qualities in the eight *lais* in which it appears, some of which seem contradictory.<sup>5</sup> In two *lais* (*Equitan* and *Bisclavret*), adulterous love and sex are portrayed negatively, both in their qualities and consequences. On the other hand, six of the eight contain positive portrayals of the sexual relationships therein, despite the fact that four of these relationships are adulterous (*Guigemar*, *Yonec*, *Milun*, *Chievrefoil*). One of these *lais* (*Yonec*) even gives the adulterous relationship of its protagonists highly Christianized overtones. The *Lais* are equally diverse from the standpoint of sexual fertility. Children result from sexual relationships that are depicted both positively (*Yonec* and *Milun*) and negatively (*Bisclavret*). Likewise, both positive relationships (*Guigemar*, *Fresne*, *Lanval*, *Chievrefoil*) and negative ones (*Equitan*) remain sterile. As this brief overview shows, one cannot make any easy generalizations regarding sexual morality or sexual fertility in the *Lais*.<sup>6</sup>

The work's first *lai*, *Guigemar*, involves an eponymous protagonist whom personified Nature has created indifferent to love. In contrast, the woman who will become his lover is presumably favorable to love, for the walls of her room are covered with paintings depicting Venus and love's teachings.<sup>7</sup> The two are

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<sup>4</sup> *Deus Amanz* depicts a 'Donkey Skin' scenario in which a father loves his daughter a bit too much and thwarts her love for her young neighbor, thus bringing to the *Lais* a non-sexual variation on the theme of children; unless we have to read the father's behavior in a subtle way as incestuous. **Editor's note:** The spilling of the magical potion at the end on the top of the mountain, after the young man has died from exhaustion, and his beloved has also passed away out of grief, might of course also be read as a sexual metaphor because it allows many flowers and other plants to grow, as if the potion had inseminated the ground everywhere.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Kay argues, by way of medieval logic, that contradiction represents an integral component of twelfth-century courtly literature in France (*Courtly Contradictions: The Emergence of the Literary Object in the Twelfth Century*. *Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001]). See also Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things: Exegesis, Dialectic, and the Poetics of Didacticism*. *Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Hanning and Ferrante's introduction to their translation and individual commentaries on each *lai* offer an excellent introductory study to Marie's work (*The Lais of Marie de France*). The useful "Notes" to Rychner's edition (235–88) offer more specialized textual commentary. Cf. also Rychner's "Introduction" (vii–xlv); Emanuel J. Mickel, Jr., *Marie de France* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974); and Glyn S. Burgess, *The Lais of Marie de France: Text and Context* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of the painting of Venus throwing *le livre Ovide* into the fire, cf. Tracy Adams, "'Arte Regendus Amor': Suffering and Sexuality in Marie de France's *Lai de Guigemar*," *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 17, 2 (2005 Fall): 285–315.



brought together when Guigemar is wounded in the thigh by an arrow he himself shot at a passing hind and which rebounded to hit him. The hero's love-impotence, thus materialized in his wound, finds an echo in the sexual impotence of the old priest assigned to guard the lady ("les plus bas membres out perduz" ['he'd lost his nether member', v. 257]).<sup>8</sup> In this way, the lady who serves as the *Lais'* first heroine is surrounded at the same time by the images of powerful feminine love on her walls (Venus casting Ovid's book—usually thought to be *Remedia Amoris*—in the flames) and figures of sexually and / or amorously impotent male figures in real life (Guigemar, the old priest, her jealous and old husband). *Guigemar* thus enacts a complex dynamic of gender and power as they relate to love. Women are shown as physically imprisoned but amorously powerful, while the men who have power over her lack the potency and inclination to love. For his part, Guigemar's wound triggers a supernaturally-assisted journey which brings him to the woman and eventually reverses his love-impotence.

When Guigemar and the lady agree to love each other, they seal the deal with a kiss ("e il la baise" ['and he kisses her', v. 529]) and soon, much more: "Ensemble gisent e parolent / E sovent baisent e acolent" ('They lie down together and converse, / kissing and embracing often', vv. 531–32). Marie uses the much-commented word of the famous Prologue to the *Lais*—"surplus"—to evoke elliptically their sexual relations: "Bien lur covienge del surplus, / De ceo que li autre unt en us!" ('I hope they also enjoy whatever else / others do on such occasions', vv. 533–34). In the Prologue, Marie states that the Ancients purposely made their writing obscure, in order that those to come might learn to gloss the letter ("gloser la lettre", v. 15) and add to it the surplus of their meaning ("de lur sen le surplus mettre", v. 16).

Setting aside the debate over whom the possessive pronoun "lur" refers to, one notes that in both the Prologue and *Guigemar*, Marie uses the word "surplus" to refer to something purposefully obscured: on the one hand, textual meaning, on the other, sexual relations.<sup>9</sup> R. Howard Bloch reads sexual / erotic meaning behind "surplus" in both *Guigemar* and the Prologue, claiming that the word "is regularly used in Old French, as it is in 'Guigemar,' to indicate the sexual act, pleasure that

<sup>8</sup> Adams writes, "The location of Guigemar's wound leaves no question as to the logic behind the curse or the type of love he is ordered to seek. To cure himself he must love, which means, first and foremost, loving sexually" ("Arte Regendus Amor," 304).

<sup>9</sup> Intriguingly, v. 533 of *Guigemar*—"Bien lur covienge del surplus"—contains the same possessive pronoun *lur*, although its referent is not obscure. On the interpretation of "lur" in the Prologue, cf. Alfred Foulet and K. D. Uitti, "The Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France: A Reconsideration," *Romance Philology* 35, 1 (1981 Aug.): 242–49; here 246–47.

exceeds language."<sup>10</sup> Adams develops further the parallel created by the use of "surplus" in the Prologue and *Guigemar*:

For Marie, interpretation is the act of supplementing an incomplete source. In the *Lai de Guigemar*, her structure of love is homologous. The sexual act, insufficient in itself, achieves its status as an act of love only when the lovers "interpret" it by supplying the remainder of the sense, the "surplus," just as readers add their own sense to an insufficient text to make it signify.<sup>11</sup>

To expand upon Bloch and Adams, we can note that each occurrence of the word adds a layer of meaning to the other. The use of "surplus" in *Guigemar* encourages us to understand, in light of the Prologue, that Marie is not just suggesting sexual activity, but also subtly highlighting her own evasion of narrative clarity (*i.e.*, her own decision to "speak obscurely" as in v. 12 of the Prologue). In turn, the sexual connotations of "surplus" in *Guigemar* cause us to return to the Prologue and see in the interpretive "surplus" put into ("mettre") the ancients by those to come ("cues ki a venir esteient", v. 13) a certain *fertilization*—an act of pro-creation. In this way, *Guigemar* allows us to see how the notion of fertility is interwoven into the *Lais'* Prologue.<sup>12</sup> Along these lines, Matilda Bruckner even sees evocations of childbirth in the Prologue's "greuose ovre" (v. 25) and "e de grant dolor delivrer" (v. 27), stating, "Marie models her writerly role on that of a mother giving birth after much travail."<sup>13</sup>

From the standpoint of sexuality, *Guigemar's* most characteristic traits are perhaps the hero's incapacity for love and the lovers' choice to ensure their fidelity to one another through objects expressive of sexual abstinence. Thus, the *Lais*, a work celebratory of courtly love, opens on a note of "natural" indifference to love. This is followed by a supernaturally-induced reversal of this indifference via the sexual healing of a near-sexual wound, and then of a chosen "binding up" of this sexuality through the protagonists' abstinence-objects. *Guigemar* is the *Lais'* first instance of abstinence; the second and last can be found in *Eliduc*, the work's last

<sup>10</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 47.

<sup>11</sup> Adams, "'Arte Regendus Amor,'" 286–87.

<sup>12</sup> Marie's Prologue has generated bountiful scholarly "glossing." Among the most noted are Leo Spitzer, "The Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France and Medieval Poetics," *Modern Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Medieval and Modern Literature* 41, 2 (1943 Nov): 96–102; D. W. Robertson, Jr., "Marie de France, *Lais*, Prologue, 13–16," *Modern Language Notes* 64, 5 (1949 May): 336–38; Kristine Brightenback, "Remarks on the 'Prologue' to Marie de France's *Lais*," *Romance Philology* 30 (1976): 168–77; Alfred Foulet and K.D. Uitti, "The Prologue to the *Lais* of Marie de France: A Reconsideration"; R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France*, esp. the introduction and 32–36.

<sup>13</sup> Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Le Fresne's Model for Twinning in the *Lais* of Marie de France," *Modern Language Notes* 121 (2006): 946–60; here 957.

*lai*, where the three protagonists dedicate themselves fully to God (cf. vv. 1153–80). While abstinence in *Guigemar* expresses sexual fidelity and exclusivity, in *Eliduc* it expresses religious devotion and thus becomes chastity. In other words, the representation of sexuality in *Guigemar* points to a closing off of the couple from everything that is not the other, while in *Eliduc* it designates an opening: to God, to a life of service, and to the heavenly afterlife. In this way, Marie's first and last *lais* enact the setting aside of sexuality, but to different ends—the first human-centered, the last God-centered.

In *Guigemar*, images of enclosure, binding up, locking up, etc. are abundant: not only the willful withholding of the “extra / surplus” of the protagonists' sexual relations, but also the walled-off enclosure in which the lady is kept prisoner by her jealous husband (“la out un clos tut environ”, v. 220), the lady's binding up of Guigemar's wound (“Puis l'unt estreitement bendé”, v. 373), and of course the knotted shirt and tightly fitting belt by which Guigemar and the lady pledge their fidelity to one another.<sup>14</sup> To these images of closing off correspond multiple images of opening, as when the lady suddenly finds her prison door mysteriously open, or when the lovers recognize one another through the opening of the shirt and belt, or again through Marie's discrete refusal to name their sexual union, which of course “opens” the truth to us just as it closes it off. Thus, *Guigemar* is marked by gestures of willful enclosure, binding up, and withholding—gestures that find themselves mysteriously undone in due time. In this way, this first *lai* enacts the purposeful obscuring of meaning suggested by the Prologue—precisely through the sexuality-related discretion *topos*—while opening perhaps before us the rest (“le surplus”) of our interpretive journey as readers of the remaining *Lais*.

As I mentioned, in only two of the twelve *lais* does sex take on overtly negative connotations: *Equitan* and *Bisclavret*. The notion of equity present in *Equitan*'s name (< lat. *aequitas*, ‘evenness, balance, equity’) is problematized throughout the second *lai*, in part through the corresponding notion of reversal.<sup>15</sup> *Equitan* is a king

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Ribard discusses Guigemar's *plait* et *ceinture*, seeing love's call to opening in the objects' images of closure: “Tout se passe en effet comme si la poétesse avait voulu exprimer ainsi le nécessaire renoncement, pour chacun des deux héros, à quelque chose de clos, de fermé, de narcissique, et comme s'il appartenait à chacun d'eux de briser le carcan de l'autre pour permettre leur ouverture réciproque et leur épanouissement mutuel...” (“Le lai de Guigemar: conjointure et senefiance,” in *Amour et merveille: Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Dufournet [Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995], 133–45; here 139). See also Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt: A Myth-Making Process*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 107–12.

<sup>15</sup> Hanning and Ferrante also note that *Equitan*'s name “makes an ironic comment on the story” (*The Lais of Marie de France*, 21). On names and naming in the *Lais*, cf. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, “Strategies of Naming in Marie de France's *Lais*: At the Crossroads of Gender and Genre,” *Neophilologus*, 75, 1 (1991 Jan): 31–40.

who becomes enamored of the wife of his seneschal. When he offers his love to her, she hesitates due to the inequality of their social positions:

Si issi fust que vus amasse  
 E vostre requeste otteiasse,  
 Ne sereit pas uël partie  
 Entre nus deux la druërie.  
 Pur ceo que estes reis puissaunz  
 E mis sire est de vus tenaunz,  
 Quidereiez a mun espeir  
 Le dangier de l' amur avoir.  
 Amur n'est pruz se n'est egals. (vv. 131–37)

[If I should love you  
 and satisfy your desire,  
 love wouldn't be shared equally  
 between the two of us.  
 Because you're a powerful king  
 And my husband is your vassal,  
 I'm sure you believe  
 your rank entitles you to my love.  
 Love is worthless if it's not mutual.]

Equitan wins her over by declaring that he will reverse this disparity ("Ne me tenez mie pur rei, / Me spur vostre humme e vostre ami" ['Don't think of me as your king, / but as your vassal and your lover', vv. 170–71]), but the social inequality noted by the lady at the onset defiles their union and announces its ignominious ending. By making himself subservient to a woman beneath his station, Equitan neglects his kingly duty to marry and produce an heir, a situation which the lady tries to remedy by suggesting that they marry after killing her husband. She proposes that they substitute boiling water for her husband's usual bath (suggesting again the theme of inversion/reversal). When the seneschal finds the lovers in his own bed ("sur le lit al seignur", v. 281), the king tries to hide his "vileinie" by jumping feet first into the boiling water meant for the other man ("Dedenz la cuve saut joinz piez", v. 295). The nameless husband effects one last reversal by throwing his unfaithful wife into the bath in the opposite direction, *i.e.* head first ("le chief avant", v. 304). As we see, a series of reversals and substitutions reenact the problematic social inequality and inequity present in the love of a king for his best man's wife (*droit du seigneur* notwithstanding).<sup>16</sup> These reiterated reversals illustrate the epilogue's lesson: "Tels purcace le mal d' autrui / Dunt tuz li mals revert sur lui" ('he who plans evil for another / may have that

<sup>16</sup> Hanning and Ferrante underline the notion of exchange, in particular that which takes place between the king's public and the seneschal's private identities (*The Lais of Marie de France*, 71–72).

evil rebound back on him', v. 309–10). Equitan, whose name and position destined him to be the story's "good guy," turns out to be a villain due to his iniquitous choice of sexual partner. In the end, sex in *Equitan* serves to reflect a political injustice presumably more disturbing to the social order than adultery between equals (or between a woman and a man who is her social inferior).

*Fresne* contains an example of both a fertile and a childless sexual relationship. The *lai* begins on a note of super-fertility by describing the birth of two sets of twins to two neighboring couples. When the first wife gives birth to twin boys, the second wife calls into doubt her neighbor's honor by suggesting that twins result from a woman having sex with two men. When some time later she herself gives birth to twin girls, she seeks to avoid dishonor by abandoning one of her daughters. The doubling motif suggested by the two sets of twins corresponds to the presence of doubled plot lines in this *lai*. Bruckner emphasizes this "twinning" in *Fresne*, noting that "An elaborately symmetrical and imbricated narrative structure reinforces the role of twins at the level of character development and deepens the inquiry into the profoundly disorienting phenomenon of a twoness that is simultaneously a oneness."<sup>17</sup> As the embarrassed mother physically gives birth to her daughter, abandons her, and later finds her, so does the mother's story generate that of her daughter, diverge from it, and later join it again. In this way, the mother's fertile sexuality—and her self-induced shame with regards to it—are generative: not only of children, but of the story to follow.<sup>18</sup>

*Fresne* is one of the collection's most realistic *lais*, in significant part due to its pragmatic treatment of matters related to fertility. For example, both mother and daughter are deeply affected by the correlation of sex and fertility. As noted, the mother's twin birth suggests an over-abundant and thus shameful sexuality. Later, her daughter *Fresne* must also contend with the risks of sexuality. Evoking the shame of a possible pregnancy, *Fresne*'s lover, Gurun, persuades her to leave the kindly abbess who has raised her: "S'entur li feussez enceintee, / Durement sereit curucie" ('if you became pregnant right under her roof / she'd be furious', vv. 283–84<sup>19</sup>). Once *Fresne* follows Gurun—a feudal lord—to his lands, she is deemed unsuitable for marriage by his barons, at least in part because they believe she is

<sup>17</sup> Bruckner, "Le *Fresne*'s Model for Twinning in the *Lais* of Marie de France," 948. Bruckner's insightful article does not purport to deal directly with fertility, but nonetheless touches on several of the issues I raise here with regards to *Fresne*. Her notion of *twinning* seems a particularly helpful one for conceptualizing the inter-connectedness of many individual *lais*.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Rupert Pickens, "Poétique et sexualité chez Marie de France: L'Exemple de *Fresne*," *Et c'est la fin pour quoy sommes ensemble: Hommage à Jean Dufournet, professeur à la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Littérature, histoire et langue du Moyen Age*, I–III, ed. Jean-Claude Aubailly, Emmanuèle Baumgartner, Francis Dubost, Liliane Dulac, and Marcel Faure (Paris: Champion, 1993), vol. III, 1119–31. Pickens focuses on the fecundity of discourse in *Fresne*, in particular the mother's.

<sup>19</sup> Translation adapted.

infertile. In fact, her name, which recalls the ash tree she was found in as an infant, comes to evoke her inability to "bear fruit" by having children. The barons proclaim about her, "Li freisnes ne porte unke fruiz!" ("the ash bears no fruit", v. 340). (We do not know whether the barons refer to the sterility of Gurun's relationship with her so far, or her inability to bear legitimate children due to her unknown social station.) Finally, it is because the mother so fears the dishonor associated with her twin birth (thanks to the rumors she herself spread about her neighbor) that Fresne is cut off from her true lineage and therefore in danger of losing her chance at the happy fertility of marriage.

In addition to its realistic portrayal of the correlation between sex and children, *Fresne* also offers a matter-of-fact depiction of the fertility-related issue of infant care. We are told in some detail how the porter who finds the newborn Fresne brings her to his daughter, who is widowed and has a child who is still nursing: "Une fille ot, ki vedve esteit; / Sis sire ert morz, enfant aveit, / Petit, en berz e aleitait" ('He had a daughter who was a widow; / her husband was dead and she had a child, / still in the cradle, whom she was nursing', vv. 193–95). Emphasis is placed on the practical matters of bathing, and especially nursing, the infant. The porter instructs his daughter, "De vostre leit le m'alaitiez!" ('With your milk nurse her for me!' [v. 201]<sup>20</sup>). She carefully lights a fire and warms and bathes the baby before nursing her ("Le feu alume, l'enfant prent, / Eschaufé l'ad e bien baigné, / Puis l'ad de sun leit aleitié" [vv. 204–06]). In this brief passage, the word "leit" ('milk') and its derivatives are repeated five times, indicating with knowing pragmatism the importance that milk takes on when one is caring for a newborn.<sup>21</sup>

In summary, fertility-related matters play a central role in driving *Fresne's* narrative from the start. On a most basic level, *Fresne* is the very female-oriented story of how a mother and daughter cope with the social realities of fertility and lineage. Love and sex are less important here than the evolving and doubled process of self-discovery set in motion by motherhood. Fresne is unquestionably her mother's moral superior, but must nonetheless rely on her in order to discover her true identity. Reciprocally, the mother needs her daughter's example in order to learn to act with love and put the good of another above her own self-image. In no other *lai* perhaps do we see such a striking evolution as that undergone by Fresne's mother who, despite her initial failing, shows a capacity for courageous change. As the daughter's exemplary self-sacrifice inspires her mother to

<sup>20</sup> Translation adapted.

<sup>21</sup> This has prompted Jeanne Wathelet-Willem to write, "les soins matériels que réclame un bébé ne sont nullement étrangers aux préoccupations de l'auteur" ("L'Enfant dans les *Lais* de Marie de France," *L'Enfant au moyen-âge [Littérature et Civilisation]*, *Senefiance* 9 [Aix-en-Provence: Publications du CUER MA and Paris: Honoré Champion, 1980]), 299–313; here 309). Wathelet-Willem sees this as an argument in favor of the *Lais'* author being a woman.

selflessness, the mother's transformation allows Fresne to come into her own as wife and potential mother. In *Fresne*, the mother/daughter bond holds a powerful potential for moral betterment, prompting us to consider fertility as a crucial element of spiritual process.<sup>22</sup>

*Bisclavret*, the fourth *lai* to contain a reference to sexual relations, is the second and last in which these relations are depicted negatively. When Bisclavret's wife learns that he is a werewolf, she no longer wants to sleep with him: "En maint endreit se purpensa / Cum ele s'en puïst partir: / Ne voleit mes lez lui gisir" ("Over and over she considered / how she might get rid of him; / she never wanted to sleep with him again", vv. 100–02). She decides to invite a knight who has long loved her to become her paramour. At the *lai*'s conclusion, we are told that the wife and her lover are banished for their betrayal and that they have many children ("Enfanz en ad asez eü" [v. 309]). It is the *Lais'* only mention of a couple having several children (and noseless ones no less!). In this case, abundant fertility seems a clear indication of the couple's, and in particular the wife's, base and disloyal behavior.

*Lanval* contains perhaps the *Lais'* most unabashed celebration of sex, and also its most unproductive. When King Arthur forgets to provide materially for his knight, Lanval, a fairy-woman providentially appears to make up for the oversight. Her intervention takes two forms: financial and sexual. The woman's beauty and magical abilities are plainly supernatural, and correspondingly, her relationship with Lanval is free of the human concerns which love usually involves in Marie's work. Compared with the *Lais'* other female protagonists, the moral beauty of Lanval's *amie* is not described; rather, emphasis is placed on her physical beauty alone. Time and again, she appears in various states of undress, and the narrator emphasizes both the superlative beauty of her body (cf. vv. 97–106, vv. 559–92) and her purposeful showcasing of it: "Sun mantel ad laissié cheir / Que mieuz la peüssent veer" ("And she let her cloak fall / so they could see her better", vv. 605–06). She willingly incarnates sexual desirability. The absolute secret she imposes on Lanval concerning their relationship corresponds to the silence that closes upon the other-worldly couple as they leave Arthur's court for Avalon:

Od li s'en vait en Avalun,  
Ceo nus recuntent li Bretun,

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<sup>22</sup> The women-to-woman bond of Guildeluec and Guilliadun in *Eliduc* generates a similar spiritual transformation. In light of my analysis of "Fresne," it is tempting to consider the loving regard of Guildeluec for the young Guilliadun as quasi-maternal. For a study of mother-daughter relationships in the Middle Ages, see Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997); and Albrecht Classen, "Die Mutter spricht zu ihrer Tochter. Literarsoziologische Betrachtungen zu einem feministischen Thema," *German Quarterly* 75, 1 (2002): 71–87, with missing endnotes in 75, 2 (2002): 159.

En un isle ki mut est beaus.  
 La fu raviz li dameiseaus!  
 Nuls hum n'en oï plus parler  
 Ne jeo n'en sai avant cunter. (vv. 641–46)

[With her he went to Avalon,  
 so the Bretons tell us,  
 to a very beautiful island;  
 there the youth was carried off.  
 No man heard of him again,  
 and I have no more to tell.]

In this way, their relationship is singularly infertile: it leads nowhere and to nothing (in the earthly sense, at least), with the exception of Marie's *lai* itself.

Like *Fresne*, *Yonec* tells the tale of two generations and is titled after the child representing the second generation.<sup>23</sup> Unlike *Fresne*, however, the young man Yonec appears only in the last lines of the *lai* and is not therefore central to the story's plot. Nevertheless, his birth, his mother, and his father's name are referred to in the *lai*'s prologue, indicating the importance of fertility and lineage here. In fact, the story's main protagonist is Yonec's mother, who is never named. She is a *mal mariée*, chosen as wife by an old, rich lord for child-bearing purposes ("femme prist pur enfanz aveir" [v. 19]). She is loved by her husband for her beauty ("pur sa beauté l'ad mut amee" [v. 23]), yet his love does not keep him from holding her captive for seven years, away from all friends and family. This incarceration indicates that the marriage is in fact loveless and, correspondingly, both morally and physically barren. The narrator states explicitly that they never had children: "Unques entree us n'eurent enfanz" (v. 38). In this way, the fertility of the woman's relationship with Muldumarec, announced in the Prologue, is set against a stark backdrop of barrenness, imprisonment, and old age (both the husband's and that of the sister whom he assigns to watch over his young wife).

Muldumarec brings the woman the magical adventures she has imagined of the outside world. What changes is not so much her external as her internal reality which, like the springtime blooming outside her tower window ("Ceo fu el meis d'avril entrant, / Quant cil oisel eminent lur chant" ['It was the beginning of April / when the birds begin their songs', vv. 51–52]), blossoms into joy. Words connoting the pleasures of love and the woman's happiness show the internal

<sup>23</sup> "Fresne" and "Yonec" also share an important object: the *palie roé* (a silk cloth with roses on it). In "Fresne," Fresne is swaddled in the *palie roé* by her mother before she is abandoned, and it is later the object by which the mother recognizes her (vv. 123, 403); in "Yonec," it covers the body of Muldumarec when the woman arrives at his tomb (v. 501). In both cases, the cloth metonymically signifies the (re)discovery and recovery of the parent-child bond by a child who has come of age.



change wrought by the visits of her magical bird-lover ("Quant unt asez *ris e jué* / E de lur priveté *parlé*" ['When they had laughed and played / and spoken intimately', vv. 193–94], "E de lui sun *delit* avoir" ['and enjoy herself with him', v. 220], "Ele l'ad tut a sun *pleisir*" ['she had him all to her pleasure', v. 223], "Or l'en duinst Deus lunges *joïr*" ['God, let their joy endure!', v. 224], "Pur la grant *joie* u ele fu" ['Because of the great joy she felt', v. 225], "Kar mut *desire* sun ami" ['She longed for her love', v. 268], "Ensemble funt *joie* mut grant" ['They gave each other great joy', v. 271]). Her new internal reality soon transforms her former barrenness into fecundity, and she conceives a child.

In *Yonec*, fertile sexuality is the direct result of true love, a fact emphasized by the sterility of the woman's seven-year marriage with the old man. Unlike *Fresne*, where children were represented as the matter-of-fact consequence of sexual relations, in *Yonec* they reflect the almost miraculous transformations effected by love.

The woman's adulterous affair, in particular its sexual expression, is strongly Christianized. Before consenting to become Muldumarec's lover, the woman wants to make sure that he believes in God ("E dit qu'ele en ferat sun dru / s'en Deu creïst", vv. 138–39]). He proves his belief to her by lying down in her bed and magically taking on her female semblance in order to receive the Eucharistic host ("La semblance de vus prendrai, / Le cors Damedeu recevrai" [vv. 161–62]). Not long after, they make love in the same bed. The striking hybrid of Christian and pagan overtones in this scene and throughout the *lai* charge sexuality and fertility with sacred implications in *Yonec*. The tale contains many Christian resonances in addition to the lovers' partaking of the Eucharist before consummating their love: Muldumarec's bird form recalls medieval images of the Holy Spirit, by which Mary is said to have conceived Jesus; Muldumarec dies in sacrifice to his love, pierced through by the husband's trap, but not before announcing, Gabriel-like, the coming birth ("De lui est enceinte d'enfant. / Un fiz avra, pruz et vaillant" ['she was pregnant with his child. / She would have a son, brave and strong', vv. 327–28]); he lives again through his son, who triumphs over evil (in the form of the old husband). In *Yonec*, sex and its resulting fertility are mysterious, sacred, and grandiose.

*Milun* resembles *Yonec* in several ways. It recounts the love affair of a *mal mariée* and a knight that produces a son; the son's identity is hidden until he comes of age but is revealed in the end; and a talented bird (this time, a swan) helps the couple conduct their affair (by carrying their letters back and forth). These similarities invite a comparison of the two *lais*, especially with regards to the two son figures, *Yonec* and *Senz Per* ('Peerless', *Milun*'s son).<sup>24</sup> Most notably, perhaps, these two

<sup>24</sup> Rupert Pickens studies *Yonec* and *Milun* with regards to sexual and especially textual generation in "The Poetics of Androgyny in the *Lais* of Marie de France: *Yonec*, *Milun*, and the General

sons—the only two of the *Lais*<sup>25</sup>—assume an important role in setting things right at the stories' respective conclusions. Yonec learns the truth of his origins and summarily executes his foster father with his true father's sword. (His foster father—his mother's elderly husband—had set traps for and killed Muldumarec.) Although Yonec's appearance is brief, the *lai* is named after him, a sign of his central importance to the story's meaning. *Milun* is titled after Senz Per's father, shifting the *lai*'s center of gravity from son to father.<sup>26</sup> Compared with *Yonec*, we learn far more of Senz Per's story. The tale contains details about his infancy, his upbringing by a maternal aunt, and his transformation into a knight so exemplary that he inspires his father's jealousy. Yet the *lai*'s title seems to indicate that more important than Senz Per's achievements is Milun's reaction to them. In a manner reminiscent of the mother in *Fresne*, the father moves from fear and jealousy to pride and love as he learns to make way for his son to surpass him. In direct contrast with Yonec who kills his mother's husband, Senz Per intends to do the same in order to facilitate his parents' reunion but doesn't get the chance because the husband conveniently dies a natural death. *Milun*'s less drastic ending is well suited to its gentler and more humanistic quality. Thus, *Yonec* and *Milun* work the themes of paternity and lineage in varied, but not disparate fashion.

*Milun* also presents a variant on the adulterous love affair of the *mal mariée* depicted in *Yonec*. While Yonec's mother was married for seven years before his father arrived on the scene, Milun and his *amie* become lovers and conceive a child *before* she is married to another man. Unlike most of the other *lais*, where the love relationship and the feelings it generates are described in some detail, the narrative does not initially pay much heed to the love story. Conception seems to be the main point of this relationship, for it occurs almost immediately:

Delez sa chamber en un vergier  
 U ele alout esbanier,  
 La justouent lur parlement  
 Milun e ele bien suvent.  
 Tant i vint Milun, tant l'ama  
 Que la dameisele enceinta. (vv. 49–54)

[Outside her room, in a grove  
 where she went to amuse herself,

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Prologue," *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture: Selected Papers from the 7th Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 27 July–1 August 1992*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 211–19.

<sup>25</sup> The *Lais* portray three daughters: Fresne, the king's daughter in *Deus Amanz*, and Guilliadon in *Eliduc*.

<sup>26</sup> On titles in the *Lais*, cf. Rychner, *Les Lais de Marie de France*, xv–xvi; Hanning and Ferrante, *The Lais of Marie de France*, 20–21; and Bruckner, "Strategies of Naming in Marie de France's *Lais*: At the Crossroads of Gender and Genre."

she and Milun, very often,  
 had a rendezvous.  
 Milun came there so often and loved her so much  
 That the girl became pregnant.]

The pregnancy is hidden, the child brought up by an aunt, and the woman married off to a rich baron. It is only later, when the two are separated, that their love affair is described in more detail. Their son and his eventual reunion with his father seem to be the foremost purpose of the relationship and of the narrative. While the love relationship of *Milun* exists to engender the story of Senz Per's encounter with his father (in other words, narratively speaking, love serves the immediate and especially the far-reaching purposes of fertility), Yonec is born to reflect the fecundity of his parents' love relationship (*i.e.*, fertility serves to illustrate love by giving it tangible manifestation).

*Milun* also resembles *Fresne* in its detailed description of infant care, in contrast with *Yonec*, which provides no such information. As in *Fresne*, *Milun* stands out for its realism in this regard. Those entrusted with the infant's care during the long journey to the aunt's home in Northumberland, we are told, stop seven times a day to nurse him, change his diaper, and bathe him:

Par les viles u il errouent  
 Set feiz le jur se resposoent;  
 L'enfant feseint aleitier,  
 Cuchier de nuvel e baignier.                    (vv. 109–12)

[As they traveled from town to town,  
 they stopped to rest seven times a day;  
 they had the child nursed,  
 changed, and bathed.]

We are meant to understand that this baby is well cared for from the beginning, and the *lai's* author appears to have accurate knowledge of what such care entails. These details, along with the pregnancy which almost immediately results from the relationship, orient *Milun* toward realism.

*Chievrefoil*, the last *lai* in which sexual relations are present (if only through reference to the well-known *Tristan and Iseut* legend), stands out by what it lacks; namely, any explicit reference to lovemaking. The passage describing Tristan and Iseut's reunion in the woods does not clearly indicate whether their activities there include anything more than joyous talk: "Entre eus meinent joie mut grant. / A li parlat tut a leisir / E ele li dit sun plaisir" ('They took great joy in each other. / He spoke to her as much as he desired, / she told him whatever she liked', vv. 94–96). I have included *Chievrefoil* in my survey because the sexual nature of the relationship of the famous adulterous lovers was so well known that it did not need to be explicitly stated. There is little material here for my analysis, however,

beyond saying that in the context of both the *Lais* and the *Tristan and Iseut* legend, the absence of any reference to lovemaking is unusual, and therefore noteworthy. In this *lai*, the collection's shortest but also perhaps most famous, Marie distinguishes herself from other poets of the legend, precisely by leaving sexuality out.

As this brief discussion reveals, sexuality and fertility play varied functions in the *Lais*. Sexuality can be base (as in *Equitan* and *Bisclavret*), restorative (*Guigemar*), productive (*Milun*), all-consuming (*Lanval*), socially awkward (*Fresne*), mysterious (*Yonec*), or wasted (*Les deux amanz*). Above all, perhaps, sexuality is *expressive*, for the *Lais'* characters live out their sexuality in ways that reveal the questions they are striving to answer and the motivations that drive them. Moreover, it is clear that the *lais* are hermeneutically linked to each other via the themes of sex and fertility, exemplifying Kristine Brightenback's suggestion that, for Marie, "gloss [from the Prologue's *gloser la lettre*] pertains not only to the circumscribed fabric of each specific *lai*, but also to the relation between the various *lais* and, subsequently, to the coherence of the collection as a whole."<sup>27</sup> As Bruckner evocatively writes, "in the context of the *Lais*, multiple orbits set stories spinning in relation to one another."<sup>28</sup> Once again, Bruckner's concept of *twinning* proves enlightening (and the term itself particularly felicitous for a study of fertility). My analyses of *Fresne*, *Yonec*, and *Milun* in particular show how these tales "twin" one another via fertility-related themes and motifs. In this sense, fertility is both textual and metatextual, as fertility within individual *lais* prompts the reader to perceive "twins" in other *lais*, in turn creating a vision of the text itself as abundantly fecund.

Sexuality in the *Lais'* is repeatedly linked to fertility, a fact which differentiates the work from much of contemporary courtly literature. While multiple births are suspicious (as in *Fresne*) or outright negative (as in *Bisclavret*), single offspring are seen as positive expressions of their parents' love (*Yonec*, *Milun*). But the function of children in the *Lais* goes beyond reflecting the parents' love or adding a touch of realism. In *Fresne* and *Milun*, children are involved in two parallel progressions, their own and those of their parents. In both cases, children need their parents (significantly, of the same gender) in order to discover their true identity and fulfill their destiny. In turn, the parents are inspired by their children to evolve towards a higher morality. Surprisingly perhaps, it is the parents who are most affected by the parent-child bond. The admiration that *Fresne's* mother and *Milun* come to have for their children engender in them a learning process, eventually leading to a joyful self-transformation. *Yonec's* commentary on the parent-child relationship

<sup>27</sup> Brightenback, "Remarks on the 'Prologue' to Marie de France's *Lais*," 176–77.

<sup>28</sup> Bruckner, "Le *Fresne's* Model for Twinning in the *Lais* of Marie de France," 953.

is different, for here, the father must die and even be temporarily forgotten in order for his son to grow safely into his destiny.

The collection's last and longest *lai*, *Eliduc*, stands out from the rest of the *lais* for its different portrayal of sexuality and fertility. We are told expressly that Eliduc and the young Guilliadon do not engage in sexual relations:

Mes n'ot entre eus nule folie,  
 Joliveté ne vileinie  
 De douneier e de parler  
 E de lur beaus aveirs doner  
 Esteit tute la druërie  
 Par amur en lur cumpainie. (vv. 575–80)

[But there was no folly between them,  
 no frivolity, no shame:  
 When they were together,  
 their lovemaking consisted  
 of courting and speaking  
 and giving fine gifts.]

The moral purity implicit in their abstinence later finds resonance in the selfless reaction of Eliduc's wife to learning that her husband is in love with another woman. The ultimate decision of all three protagonists to devote themselves to the religious life points to another kind of fertility, one in which the individual looks beyond human life to the transcendent reality of God.<sup>29</sup> In the previous *lais*, there is a near-constant triangular structural tension present among three elements: usually a couple and another man (a husband, a rival suitor, or a father as in *Deus Amanz*), but sometimes a couple and a situation (*Lanval*, *Fresne*). The third element must be eliminated or resolved in order to restore the world to the static sexual balance which is based on the principle of two. In *Eliduc*, the triangular tension disappears as all three elements are subsumed into harmonious unity with God. In this way, the three characters echo perhaps the principle of the Trinity by joining their lives to the One who does not need to couple to be fertile. *Eliduc* thus elucidates one final, highly spiritual, manifestation of the multivalent sexuality at work throughout Marie de France's masterpiece.

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<sup>29</sup> Rupert Pickens emphasizes the connection between these more metaphorical forms of fertility, or "florescence," in the *Lais* and the power of speech ("En bien parler and mesparler: Fecundity and Sterility in the Works of Marie de France," *Cygne: Journal of the International Marie de France Society* 3 [2005 Fall]: 7–22).

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“Good Lovin’”:  
The Language of Erotic Desire and Fulfillment in  
Gottfried’s *Tristan*

“Honey, please squeeze me tight.  
Don’t you want your baby to be all right?  
I said Baby, now it’s for sure,  
I’ve got the fever, but you’ve got the cure. . . .  
Yes, indeed, all I really need  
Is good lovin’”

Arthur Resnick and  
Rudy Clark, “Good  
Lovin’” *The Young  
Rascals*, Atlantic, 1966

If one literary narrative of the German High Middle Ages can be said to present love in its most varied and extreme aspects, certainly that work must be Gottfried’s *Tristan*. Whether familial or amorous, Platonic or erotic, hidden or obvious, feigned or authentic, courtly or crude—love and loving become focus and driving force of nearly every plot action in Gottfried’s epic poem. In several relationships love crosses a border from *minne* to *eros*, and desire hastens to fulfillment, whether or not the lovers have solemnized their bond with holy Matrimony. As in few other works of literature, this most natural and essential basis for social relationships becomes problematical as an obstruction and a complication in the institutions at the heart of medieval society.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The secondary literature on Gottfried’s *Tristan* is massive; some of the more recent, significant studies include: *Gottfried von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend: Papers from an Anglo-North*

The idea that medieval authors employed sophisticated discursive structures and symbolisms for representing textual sex, and here I refer specifically to sexual intercourse, is not particularly new. However, most critics who have delved into sexuality in *Tristan* (e.g., W. T. H. Jackson,<sup>2</sup> Hugo Bekker,<sup>3</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger,<sup>4</sup> and James Schultz<sup>5</sup>) have discovered very different aspects of erotic expression in Gottfried's text, particularly in the way he presents love and loving and its implications for society, religion, etc. This essay intends to address the quality of love-making by examining the medieval author's descriptions of desire and fulfillment in several episodes where *eros* becomes the focus of the narrative. As in most other aspects of this version of *Tristan*, the effects are accomplished through Gottfried's powerful and sensual language, and therefore we must return again and again to the text's rich rhetorical and metaphorical fields in order to answer the question of what constitutes "good lovin'" in Gottfried's text.

The erotic interactions that Gottfried represents between the pairs of lovers in the poem take several distinct forms. Visual fantasies give rise to erotic feelings, which may or may not achieve fulfillment. The lust of a spouse is often quelled through the stoic self-sacrifice of a dutiful but disinterested partner. The dramatic seizure of *amour* immediately followed by the immanent threat of losing the beloved can inspire the one to recall the other from the edge of death through kisses and caresses, bringing both to a pinnacle of erotic passion. At the very center of the tale, the sexual encounters between the Queen and the King's nephew elude direct expression in the text—yet, one never doubts the energy of the lovers'

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*American Symposium*, ed. Adrian Stevens and Roy Wisbey (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, and London: University of London Institute of Germanic Studies, 1990); Rüdiger Schnell, *Suche nach Wahrheit: Gottfrieds "Tristan und Isold" als erkenntnistheoretischer Roman*. *Hermæa: Germanistische Forschungen*. Neue Folge, 67 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1992); Mark Chinca, *Gottfried von Strassburg: Tristan*. Landmarks of World Literature (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Christoph Huber, *Gottfried von Straßburg: Tristan*. *Klassiker-Lektüren*, 3 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2000); *Der "Tristan" Gottfrieds von Straßburg: Symposion Santiago de Compostela, 5. bis 8. April 2000*, ed. Christoph Huber and Victor Millet (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002); Joan T. Grimbert, *Tristan: A Casebook*. *Arthurian Characters and Themes*, 2 (New York: Routledge, 2002); *A Companion to Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan*, ed. Will Hasty. *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture* (Columbia, SC, and Rochester, NY: Camden House and Woodbridge : Boydell & Brewer, 2003); Walter Haug, *Die höfische Liebe im Horizont der erotischen Diskurse des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2004); and many more.

<sup>2</sup> W. T. H. Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love: the Tristan of Gottfried von Straßburg* (New York: Columbia, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Hugo Bekker, *Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan: Journey Through the Realm of Eros*. *Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture* 29 (Columbia, S. C.: Camden House, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: in Search of a Lost Sensibility*. *The Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

yearning for the physical fulfillment of their passion for one another. Several external factors determine the quality of sexual encounter that the lovers experience:

- 1) Of primary importance is the nature of the love relationship *per se* between the lovers, particularly with respect to power, obligation and choice. In other words, which partner is higher or lower in the courtly hierarchy, does either party participate in sexual activity out of a sense of sexual or marital obligation, or does each partner feel empowered to exercise a choice in what is done? These factors determine the degree of desire each feels.
- 2) Also important is the degree to which the relationship is sanctioned by social custom—the more forbidden the relationship, the more the lovers attempt to conceal, dissemble, and hide their sexual encounters; and the more hidden a relationship, the greater the degree of fulfillment the lovers seem to enjoy.

The text's three primary sexual relationships, each of which provides several examples of sexual scenes, consist of the marriage between King Mark and Isolde (and, of course, here one must also subsume the brief but most important encounter between the King and Brangæne, the bed-trick on the wedding night); the intensely erotic encounter between Tristan's parents, Riwalin and Blanschefleur, which produced Tristan; and the mythic, adulterous, and transcendent love affair between Tristan and Isolde. There are other important encounters in the text wherein one might discover sexual overtones and implications, such as in the abduction of Isolde by the knight Gandin, the tender friendship between Brangæne and Tristan, and the unrequited marriage between Tristan and Isolde of the White Hands. However, the primary relationships present the essential modes of behavior in which sex plays a personal and social role, and they best demarcate the range of possible behaviors and ways of relating on the epic poem's sexual thematic level.

## 1. Marriage and Eros: King Mark and Isolde

In a popular jazz song of 1984, Helen Adu, better known by her stage name Sade, croons against a sultry musical background of saxophone and bass:

"Your love is king  
 Crown you with my heart . . .  
 Never need to part  
 Your kisses ring  
 Round and round and round my head  
 Touching the very part of me



It's making my soul sing  
 Tearing the very heart of me  
 I'm crying out for more"<sup>6</sup>

For Sade in this song, her lover's love is "king," and her intense, physical passion finds sublime artistic expression in the teasing musical interplay of crescendo and diminuendo, of rhythmic delay and fulfillment; and the intermittent, sizzling blasts of the saxophone's accompaniment leaves little doubt that the singer has achieved the highest degree of sensual pleasure. But if love can be king, is a king's love necessarily "regal," i.e., "superlative," in Sade's sense? With respect to Gottfried's *Tristan* specifically, what of King Mark's sexual prowess? In Gottfried's renowned romance we receive a relatively clear view of how King Mark makes love. In two celebrated scenes, the king's feelings toward his beautiful bride, Isolde, receive close textual scrutiny. In the first, the notorious bed-trick scene, Brangæne slips into bed next to her king in order to convince him that Isolde, already having lost her maidenhood in the passionate embraces of her lover, Tristan, while crossing the sea from Ireland to Cornwall, is still virginal:

Brangaene haete an sich genomen  
 der küniginne cleider.  
 diu cleider ir beider  
 wâren verwandelt under in.  
 Tristan fuorte Brangaene hin  
 die marter lîden unde nôt.  
 diu lieht diu laschte ir vrouwe îsôt.  
 Marke Brangaenen zuo z'im twanc.  
 ine weiz, wie ir der anevanc  
 gevele dirre sache.  
 si dolte sô gemache,  
 daz ez gar âne brah beleip.  
 swaz ir gespil mit ir getreip,  
 si leiste unde werte,  
 swes er hin z'ir gegerte  
 mit messing und mit golde,  
 als wol alse er wolde.  
 ich wil mich ouch des wol versehen,  
 daz ez è selten sî geschehen,  
 daz ie sô schoene messinc  
 vür guldîniu teidinc  
 ze bettegelte würde gegeben.  
 deiswâr ich sazte es wol mîn leben,

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<sup>6</sup> Helen Folsade Adu and Stuart Matthewman, "Your Love is King," *Diamond Life*, Epic, 1984. Vinyl LP.

daz sît Adâmes tagen  
als edel valsch nie wart geslagen,  
noch nie sô gaebiu trûgeheit  
an mannes sîten wart geleit. (12588–614)<sup>7</sup>

[Brangæne had donned the Queen’s robes—they had exchanged clothes between them—and Tristan now led her towards him (the King) to suffer her ordeal. Her mistress Isolde put out the lights and Mark strained Brangæne to him. I do not know how Brangæne took to this business at first. She endured it so quietly that it all passed off in silence. Whatever her companion did with her, whatever demands he made on her, she met them to his satisfaction with brass and with gold. I am convinced that it can rarely have happened before that such fine brass was passed as bed-money for a payment due in gold. Indeed I would wager my life on it that false coin of such nobility had never been struck since Adam’s day, nor had so acceptable a counterfeit ever been laid beside a man . . . (207)]<sup>8</sup>

Two distinct strands of discourse inform this passage. While the first sentences may describe a typical medieval marriage bed scene, where the woman has no power of choice and must endure the man’s penetration and self-serving gratification, the language prods the reader with several strong images of suffering and force: phrases like “die marter lîden und die nôt” (12593; “to suffer her ordeal,” 207), “Marke Brangænen zuo z’im twanc” (12595; “Mark strained Brangæne to him,” 270), and “si dolte sô gemache” (12598; “She endured it so quietly,” 270) leave little doubt that the experience was far from tender or intimate—where power dominates so completely, it does so at the expense of true affection. Brangæne must, of course, endure all of this in silence, and thus she is deprived of language—she lies powerlessly and silently beneath the king’s selfish indulgences.<sup>9</sup> In this environment, even the relationship among old friends and confidantes becomes tainted: certainly, Isolde has no grounds for her fear that

<sup>7</sup> Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*. Nach dem Text von Friedrich Ranke, neu herausgegeben, ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt, mit einem Stellenkommentar und einem Nachwort von Rüdiger Krohn. 3 vols. (1980; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993); line numbers are given in parentheses.

<sup>8</sup> All translations are taken from Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, trans. A. T. Hatto (1960; London, New York, Toronto, et al.: Penguin, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> Albrecht Classen considers this scene as a test of the communicative community—Brangæne remains silent and Isolde implores God that she hold her silence (*Verzweiflung und Hoffnung: Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters*, Beihefte zur Mediaevistik 1 [Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 2002], 297). Significantly, there is no language in this scene between Mark and the two women, while the language expressed in the context of Tristan’s and Isolde’s love is sophisticated, eloquent, and characterized by double- and even triple-*entendre*. For the sexual innuendo, see the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph.

Brangæne might betray the actual state-of-affairs because of overindulgence in passion, as she thinks to herself:

tribet sî diz bettespil  
 iht ze lange und iht ze vil  
 Ich vührte ez ir sô wol behage,  
 daz sî vil lîhte dâ betage.  
 sô werde wir alle  
 ze spotte und ze schalle. (12623–28)

[If she plays this bed-game over-long and too intently I fear she will take such a liking to it that she will lie there till daylight, and we shall all be the talk of the town! (207)]

Whether Mark is having sex with his wife or with a substitute, he is indulging more in self-gratification than in actual love-making—were he a true lover, he would at least pay a modicum of attention to his partner, who he thinks is his wife. Thus, the textual discourse and the circumstances represented in the scene indicate that the royal ceremony of the wedding consummation, the wedding night, is merely service, an underling fulfillment of obligation to the lord, where one party takes and the other endures. A medieval courtly audience may have found nothing shocking *per se* in this mistreatment of women, but Gottfried makes it clear through language that the king's love is anything but regal. Certainly, there is no record here of any pleasure for the women from this kind of love-making—they endure it like any other chore.<sup>10</sup> A shock does come, however, with the realization that the women have fooled the king into thinking he actually has been lying with his spouse, and that, even when Isolde surreptitiously swaps places with Brangæne, the king is sufficiently insensate to perceive the difference in the women.

dô sî vür Îsolde  
 geleiste, daz si solde  
 unde ir teidinc ergie,  
 von dem bette sî sich lie.  
 nû was ouch Îsôt hantgar.  
 Vür daz bette saz si dar,  
 als ez diu selbe solte sîn...  
 diu junge künigîn Îsôt  
 diu leite sich mit maneger nôt,  
 mit tougenlichem smerzen  
 ir muotes unde ir herzen  
 zuo dem kûnege ir hêren nider.

<sup>10</sup> Schultz, *Courtly Love and the Love of Courtliness and the History of Sexuality*, 151, explores this point in some detail.

der greif an sîne vröude wider;  
 er twanc si nâhe an sînen lîp.  
 in dûhte wîp also wîp.  
 er vant ouch die vil schiere  
 von guoter maniere.  
 ime was ein als ander.  
 an ietwederre vander  
 golt unde messinc.  
 ouch leisten s’ime ir teidinc  
 alsô dan und alsô dar,  
 daz er nie nihtes wart gewar. (12631–74)

[When she had done duty for Isolde and her debt had been discharged, she quitted the bed. Isolde was ready waiting there, and went and sat by the bed as if she were the same person . . . The young Queen Isolde, in great distress and with secret pain in her heart, laid herself down beside her lord the King who, clasping her close to him, then resumed his pleasures. To him one woman was as another: he soon found Isolde, too, to be of good deportment. There was nothing to choose between them—he found gold and brass in either. Moreover, they both paid him their dues, one way and another, so that he noticed nothing amiss. (207–08)]

The discourse of metals in this passage is merely the vocabulary of payment for what is owed. The two women represent the body of the queen, for whose appropriation and exploitation Mark has obtained official sanction through surrogate wooing (by Tristan) and the bonds, or, perhaps better, “bondage,” of marriage. In this context, the women do not have an existence as individuals, but serve as legal, economic or political abstractions. In the king’s bedroom, women have no power of choice; they are vassals with obligations and property of the King. They are inter- and exchangeable, like goods or money. Joseph Campbell points out that Mark’s major fault here is his indifference to the individuality of his Queen,<sup>11</sup> and this disqualifies him as a lover altogether. There is no question of sexual fulfillment for the women; instead, they have endured the outrage as best they could: while the King enjoys “pleasures” (“vröude,” 12664), the women are “of good deportment” (“von guoter maniere,” 12668).

A second erotic scene presents a variation in the theme of the King’s self-gratification. Some time after banishing the lovers from his court, Mark discovers his wife and nephew in the Cave of the Lovers, the temple of their relationship. Gottfried describes Mark as he voyeuristically gazes down at Isolde while she is

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* (New York, London, Toronto, et al.: Penguin, 1968): 250.

sleeping next to Tristan on the crystalline altar of the *minnegrotte*, a bare sword lying between them:

er schouwete ie genôte  
 sînes herzen wunne Îsôte,  
 diun gedûhte in ouch dâ vor und ê  
 nie sô rehte schoene mê.  
 ine weiz von welher arbeit  
 diz maere spellet unde seit,  
 von der si erhitzet solte sîn,  
 und lûhte ir varwe unde ir schîn  
 als suoze und alse lôse  
 als ein gemischet rôse  
 hin ûf allez wider den man.  
 ir munt der viurete unde bran  
 rehte alse ein glüeender kol . . .  
 ir kinne, ir munt, ir varwe, ir lîch  
 daz was sô rehte wunneclîch,  
 sô lieplich und sô muotsam,  
 daz ir Marken gezam.  
 in gelangette unde geluste,  
 daz er si gerne kuste.  
 Minne diu warf ir vlammen an,  
 Minne envlammete den man  
 mit der schoene ir lîbes.  
 diu schoene des wîbes  
 diu spuon im sîne sinne  
 z'ir lîbe und z'ir minne.  
 sîn ouge stuont im allez dar.  
 er nam vil inneclîche war,  
 wie schoene ir ûz der waete schein  
 ir kele unde ir brustbein,  
 ir arme unde ir hende.  
 si haete âne gebende  
 ein schapel ûfe von clê.  
 sine gedûhte ir hêren nie mê  
 sô lusic und sô lustsam. (17557–607)

[He gazed and gazed at his heart's delight Isolde, who never before had seemed to him so lovely as now. Heaven knows of what exertions the tale romances here that might have flushed her cheeks, whose radiance glowed up at the man with the sweet freshness of a rose in which red and white are mingled. Her mouth burned with fire like a red-hot ember . . . Her chin, her mouth, her colour, her skin were so exquisite, lovely and enticing that Mark was captivated and filled with the desire to kiss her. Love threw on her flames, she set the man on fire with the charm of the woman's form. Her beauty lured his senses to her body, and to

the passion she excited. His eyes were fixed upon her. His gaze dwelt with ardour on the beauty of her throat, her breast, her arms, and her hands where they shone out from her robe. She wore a chaplet of clover but was without a headband—never had she seemed to her lord so bewitching and alluring! (272–73)]

As A. C. Spearing has claimed, this scene presents the king's fantasy about his estranged wife's body and his desire to possess her once again.<sup>12</sup> Gottfried carefully explains her complexion as the mere result of having spent the morning hours in the forest with Tristan, but the king's imagination magnifies the import of her rosy glow until she seems transformed into lust itself. Of course, there is no pleasure in this scene for Isolde, only Mark enjoys the heat of his own ardor and passion. It is interesting to note that, in his fantasy he also dissects the superficial appearance of his wife into component parts, identifying her arms, cheek, chin, lips, skin, etc., fanning the flames of his passion with the surface beauty of each part. His inner vision dismembers her as if to enjoy her individual portions all the more, for in this manner he can appropriate only the images that appeal to his burgeoning sexual excitement. Afterwards, however, his spirits sink to a new low point:

nu er der Sunne war genam,  
diu von obene durch den stein  
ûf ir antlütze schein,  
er vorhte, es waere ir an ir lîch  
schade unde schedelîch.  
er nam gras, bluomen unde loup,  
daz venster er dermite verschoup  
und bôt der schoenen sînen segên.  
er bat ir got den guoten pflegen  
und schiet er weinende dan.  
Alse ein trûreger man  
Kêrte er ze sînen hunden wider. (17608–20)

[Seeing the sun shine down on her face through the rock he feared it might harm her complexion, so, taking some grass, flowers, and leaves, he blocked the window. Wit a prayer to the good God to have her in his keeping, he made the sign of the cross over

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<sup>12</sup> A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 64: "In this intensely erotic passage, it is made explicit that Mark is more excited by gazing on Isolde, by devouring with his eyes the beauty he cannot now possess, than he has ever been before as her husband." Suzanne Kocher looks at male voyeurism from a medieval French perspective in her "Desire, Parody, and Sexual Mores in the Ending of Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*: An Invitation Through the Looking Glass," in this volume.

the lovely woman in farewell and went away in tears. He rejoined his hounds, a man very sad at heart. (273)]

This scene lends itself to several interpretations: for example, Albrecht Classen<sup>13</sup> maintains that in this scene Mark shows his regal kindness through his attempt to shade his lover from the sun, and thereby protect her “vor den heißen Strahlen” (“from the hot rays of the sun,” 59–60), hence he is performing an act of kindness and love; however, while there can be no doubt that Mark loves his wife, he has just been ogling her in the previous passage, dismembering her through his gaze, and enjoying her voyeuristically and sexually. The image of the sun shining too strongly on Isolde while she is lying on a bed carries strongly erotic overtones. Mark’s act of covering the window with grass and flowers is indeed a kindness, but psychologically Mark may be motivated by disappointment that he must remain outside looking in, or perhaps he feels shame at his less-than-kingly voyeurism. Mark’s physical perspective, from a hidden position above the lovers and looking down on a potentially erotic encounter between them, reminds the audience of an earlier episode, where Mark and the dwarf Melot climb a tree to spy on the lovers as they rendezvous in a garden—in both scenes, the lovers’ ingenuity fools Mark into misinterpreting the signs he witnesses, and again he plays the part of the cuckolded husband evincing uncourtly behavior. Covering up the window not only prevents the sun from shining on Isolde, but also prevents other gazes (i.e., those of Mark’s men who are nearby) from settling on her, and so the act of covering the window preserves the visual enjoyment for the king only. Finally, obscuring the view of his wife through the window serves as a denial of voyeuristic behavior: by closing off the view, Mark can “repair” his own transgression and deflect his guilt. His subsequent sadness would thus make perfect psychological sense, the affective result of the loss of his wife’s beautiful body and his own unfitting behavior gazing upon it.

Later in the tale, the psychic dissection of his wife’s body into individual physical features (e.g., her limbs, face and other sexually provocative areas) recurs as a *leitmotif* for Mark’s visual perception of his wife, when Mark intrudes on Tristan and Isolde as they are lying together after they have made love:

swaz er gesehen kunde,  
daz in diu decke sehen lie,

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<sup>13</sup> Albrecht Classen, “König Marke in Gottfrieds von Strassburg *Tristan*: Versuch einer Apologie” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 35 (1992): 37–63; Classen rescues Mark’s reputation because he is a tragic figure, a man who loves his wife and nephew and makes a noble but unsuccessful effort to understand and forgive them for the many, cruel ways they betray him; that there are a number of perspectives from which one can interpret characters and incidents in Gottfried’s *Tristan* is a testimony to the work’s brilliance and enduring significance.

daz vür daz deckelachen gie  
 zuo dem oberen ende:  
 ir arme unde ir hende,  
 ir ahsel unde ir brustbein  
 diu wâren also nâhe in ein  
 getwungen unde geslozzen  
 von êre oder von golde  
 ezn dorfte noch ensolde  
 niemer baz gevüegeet sîn. (18200–11)

[All that the coverlet permitted him to see—all that emerged to view from the sheets at the upper end—their arms and hands, their shoulders and breasts—was so closely locked together that, had they been a piece cast in bronze or in gold, it could not have been joined more perfectly. 280]

Gottfried adds the following comment, with more than a subtle note of irony and as if to emphasize the stark contrast between the king’s unacceptable perspective on love and the post-coital delight of the pair:

Tristan und diu künigîn  
 die sliefen harte suoze,  
 ine weiz nâch waz unmuoze. (18212–14)

[Tristan and Isolde were sleeping very peacefully, after some exertion or other. 280]

Thus, the king’s wooing of and marriage to Isolde is not what one would expect for the exemplary relationship of the Cornish kingdom. There is very little of what Gottfried might term “true love” in it. The relationship has, in fact, little to do with romantic love, but instead represents the patriarchal power structures generally accepted at the time.<sup>14</sup> This situation can perhaps best be described with Joseph Campbell’s phrase describing the Cornish royal marriage: “standard medieval violence,”<sup>15</sup> the insistence on the part of religious institutions that the woman submit to the will of the man. We may safely conclude that Mark’s sexual skills cannot compare in any way to the love-making represented in Sade’s lyrics. His self-centeredness during sex borders on onanism. The women become essentially the king’s means for arousal and self-gratification, and therefore lose their power and choice, essential elements of “good lovin.”

<sup>14</sup> See Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 63–66.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Campbell, *Transformations of Myth through Time* (New York, Grand Rapids, Philadelphia et al.: Harper and Row, 1990), 239.



## 2. Love at First Sight: Riwalîn and Blanscheflûr

A third passage, highly charged with eroticism, occurs at the beginning of the poem, the scene in which Riwalîn and Blanscheflûr conceive Tristan. The story of these two lovers has the potential both to fascinate and to unsettle the reader. The budding relationship between Tristan's parents occurs with striking immediacy and blinding speed, such that the lovers scarcely have the chance to react to their predicament, and have but little time to make judgments and to think of consequences.

When Riwalîn and Blanscheflûr meet, it is love at first sight. They encounter one another at her brother King Mark's festival, and through her flirtatious, enigmatic accusation that he has offended her through her dearest friend (how could Riwalîn possibly know she was referring to her heart? [754–69]), she plants the seed of fascination within him. After the festivities they can only think of each other:

nu wiste aber sî wol, daz sîn muot  
hin z'r was süeze und also guot  
als liebes muot ze liebe sol.  
daz selbe wiste er an ir wol.  
daz selbe enzunte ir beider sin.  
dâ von begunden s'under in  
sich meinen unde minnen  
mit herzenlichen sinnen.  
ez ergien in rehte, als man giht:  
swâ liep in liebes ouge siht,  
daz ist der minnen viure  
ein wahsendiu stiure. (1107–18)

[But now she was sure that his feelings towards her were tender and kind, as a lover's feelings for his love should be. And he was as sure of her. This set the thoughts of them both on fire, so that with all their hearts they fell to loving and doting on each other. They experienced the truth of the saying that where lovers gaze into each other's eyes they feed love's fire apace. (55)]

Anyone who has felt the stirrings of new love within the heart knows the unique combination of bliss and agony inherent in such a moment. Love's joys of thinking about the beloved and the sorrows of holding back the inner yearnings bring with them an intensification of perceptions and feelings that makes virtually every experience extreme, superlative, and essential.

Almost immediately, however, a tragedy occurs, and it appears to shatter the lovers' future together. Aiding Mark in battle against a bitter enemy, Riwalîn is run through the side by a spear, and lies in an infirmary, near death. It is not stated clearly in the text, but one feels compelled to ask: how did it occur that so fine and adroit a warrior was so gravely wounded? Could the young knight have been

distracted by thoughts of his beloved, from whom he was separated after so short a time together? In other words, could the wound have resulted from love? When the princess learns that her lover may die, it is almost more than she can bear. Overcome with grief, and apparently spurred on by yearning and desire, Blanscheflûr disguises herself as a nurse and manages to slip into the moribund knight's sickroom. Alone with her lover, she sits beside him, lays her cheek on his and begins to grow weak and wan:

sus lac si in der ummaht  
 und âne sinne lange,  
 ir wange an sînem wange,  
 gelîche als ob si waere tôt.  
 Nu daz sî dô von dirre nôt  
 ein lützel wider ze crefte kam,  
 ir trût si an ir arm dô nam  
 und leite ir munt an sînen munt  
 und kuste in hundert tûsent stunt  
 in einer kleinen stunde,  
 unz ime ir munt enzunde  
 sine unde craft zer minne,  
 wan minne was dar inne:  
 ir munt der tete in vröidejaft,  
 ir munt der brâhte im eine craft,  
 daz er daz keiserlîche wîp  
 an sînen halptôten lîp  
 vil nâhe und inneclîche twanc.  
 dar nâch sô was vil harte unlanc,  
 unz daz ir beider wille ergienc  
 und daz vil süeze wîp enjpfien  
 ein kint von sînem lîbe.  
 ouch was er von dem wîbe  
 und von der minne vil nâch tôt;  
 waz daz im got half ûz der nôt,  
 sône kunde er niemer sîn genesen:  
 sus genas er, wan ez solte wesen. (1304–30)

[Thus she lay senseless in a swoon for a long time, her cheek on his cheek, as though she were dead. And when she had rallied a little from this extremity she took her darling in her arms and laying her mouth to his kissed him a hundred thousand times in a short space till her lips had fired his sense and roused his mettle for love, since love resided in them. Her kisses made him gay, they brought him such vigour that he strained the splendid woman to his half-dead body, very tenderly and close. Nor was it long before they had their way and the sweet woman received a child from him. As to Rivalin he was all but dead, both of the woman and love. But for God's helping him from this dire pass he could never have lived; yet live he did, for so it was to be. (58)]

The *topos* of the lover as physician,<sup>16</sup> providing the cure for the wound that the lover her- or himself inflicts through love, resounds clearly here, and echoes the sentiments expressed in this article's epigraph—each of them has the fever, each has the cure.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps most amazingly, this single occasion of intercourse results in a pregnancy—Blanscheflûr's fecundity and Riwalîn's potency accomplish in this scene what no other coital act can produce, whether the couple's relationship is sanctified by marriage or not.<sup>18</sup>

From this description of their passionate encounter, the audience is convinced that this love bears little in common with Mark's wedding night. Each of the lovers here directs love toward the other and takes it as well. They face each other, embrace for some time, and kiss passionately.<sup>19</sup> Thus, when Riwalîn presses Blanscheflûr to himself ("daz er daz keiserliche wîb / an sînen halptôten lîp / vil nâhe und inneclîche twanc"—1319–21), the situation is far different from that of King Mark using his bedpartners for gratification. Both Riwalîn and Blanscheflûr are gray with death and grief, but through their participation in this ritual of life and death, i.e., sexual love,<sup>20</sup> they snatch one another from the jaws of death and turn once again toward life. Furthermore, their social levels are essentially even, the love they share arises from a choice freely made—as individuals they choose each other, and no other would do—and both are empowered to make love, especially the woman: Blanscheflûr initiates and determines the progress of their love, from their beginning flirtations to the torrid scene we have just witnessed.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Margit M. Sinka, "Wound Imagery in Gottfried von Strassburg's 'Tristan,'" *South Atlantic Bulletin* 42 (1977): 3–10; here 4, links the wounding of Riwalîn to both the wounding of Christ on the cross and of Adam during the creation of Eve, and Blanscheflûr with Boethius's "Lady Philosophy" and "Frau Minne" as healer.

<sup>17</sup> "... Baby, it's for sure, / I've got the fever, / You've got the cure" (Arthur Resnick and Rudy Clark, "Good Lovin,'" *The Young Rascals*, Atlantic, 1966.)

<sup>18</sup> See Molly Robinson Kelly, "Sex and Fertility in Marie de France's *Lais*," in this volume, wherein Kelly examines sexual activity, pregnancy and childbirth in eight of the *Lais*.

<sup>19</sup> Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness and the History of Sexuality*, 155, celebrates the extent to which this is a mutual love, shared by and participated in by both lovers: "One cannot but be struck by the extent to which agency and pleasure is shared. Either the lovers act together in the plural: 'they' weave their arms and legs together; or they take turns. Blanscheflûr kisses Riwalîn, he draws her close, then the intention of *both* of them is accomplished."

<sup>20</sup> See Kathleen M. Llewellyn, "Deadly Sex and Sexy Death in Early Modern French Literature," in this volume. Llewellyn examines connections between Eros and Thanatos in medieval literature, of which the various *Tristans* in both the French and German traditions provide prime examples.

<sup>21</sup> As W. T. H. Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love*, 244, claims, in reference to the *huote*-discourse section of the poem, but also applicable here: "It is for the woman to decide to whom she will give her love it, it is for her to decide on the true proportion of restraint and sexuality there will be in her life. She is as capable of making a correct decision as a male, and she should be left to make it. Love consists of sex freely given but always under the control of a sense of decency and never in any sense promiscuously."

As intense as the love affair between Tristan's parents may seem to the reader, it still does not achieve the level of their son's with Isolde. While passion arises from the forbidden tryst of Riwalîn and Blanscheflûr, their transgression is not adulterous, merely extra-marital and marked by surreptitiousness and stealth. However, Tristan and Isolde have also loved one another since they set eyes on each other, and have been perhaps too innocent to realize it.<sup>22</sup> When they finally do understand, they are deeply smitten, to the point where social taboos and even threats of death at the hands of the king and his courtiers do not dissuade them from seeking fulfillment in each other's embraces. Furthermore, their adultery isolates them to an ever greater degree—again and again they must conceal their feelings for one another and postpone their gratification in each other's arms, which intensifies the passion. The sexual relationship between Tristan and Isolde thus forms the third, and final, part of this study.

### 3. Tristan and Isolde: the Private, Perfect Love of Equals

Surprisingly, such explicitness as we have witnessed in the scene of Tristan's conception is lacking in the sections of the text devoted to the physical love-act between Tristan and Isolde. While the language makes it clear that the lovers are enjoying each others' bodies to the fullest while they are erotically intimate, Gottfried's allusions and metaphors place their activities beyond the reader's inner eye through his manipulations of the verbal image.

The most significant manipulations occur as narrator intrusions, where Gottfried implies that Tristan and Isolde are occupied with lovemaking but does not permit the reader to intrude on their privacy. This is clearly not out of Gottfried's sense of shame or prudery, since the reader was treated to graphic details while Riwalin and Blanscheflûr engaged in making love. But what we do witness in our mind's eye is the elevation of their love to the metaphorical, mythic, and symbolic level. Thus, Gottfried's treatment of the scene in which the lovers are intimate for the first time begins with secrecy and immediately ascends to the allegorical plane, where love is the physician that cures the lovers:

Des nahtes, dô diu schenen lac,  
ir triure unde ir trahte pflac  
nâch ir trûtamîse,  
nu kam geslichen lîse  
zuo der kemenâten in  
ir amîs unde ir arzâtîn,

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*, 228–31.

Tristan und diu Minne.  
 Minne diu arzâtinne  
 si vuorte ze handen  
 ir siechen Tristanden.  
 ouch vant s' Îsôte ir siechen dâ.  
 die siechen beide nam si sâ  
 und gab in ir, im sîe  
 ein ander z'arzâtîe.  
 wer haete ouch dise beide  
 von dem gemeinem leide  
 vereinet unde bescheiden  
 wan einunge an in beiden,  
 der stric ir beider sinne?  
 Minne diu strickaerinne  
 diu stricte zwei herze an in zwein  
 mit dem stricke ir süeze in ein  
 mit alsô grôzer meisterschaft,  
 mit alsô wunderlîcher craft,  
 daz si unreloeset wâren  
 in allen ir jâren. (12157–82)

[That night, as the lovely woman lay brooding and pining for her darling, there came stealing into her cabin her lover and her physician—Tristan and Love. Love the physician led Tristan, her sick one, by the hand; and there, too, she found her other patient, Isolde. She quickly took both sufferers and gave him to her, her to him, to be each other's remedy. Who else could have severed them from the ill which they shared but Union, the knot that joined their senses. Love the Ensnaerer knit their two hearts together by the toils of her sweetness with such consummate skill and such marvelous strength that in all their days the bond was never loosed. (201)]

This passage, which is immediately followed by Gottfried's own Discourse on Love (one of several "discourses" in the text where the narrator digresses on various topics, here on the nature of love), contrasts starkly with those textual segments describing King Mark's wedding night, his voyeuristic observation of Isolde in the *minnegrotte*, and the episode of love-making between Riwalîn and Blanscheflûr. Here, Gottfried keeps both bodies whole—only their hearts are woven together in the union, but otherwise there is no dissection of the lovers into arms, legs or other body parts, nor does Gottfried transform their union into a commodity through the discourse of exchange and lucre. Most importantly, there is little visual description, and what the lovers do in private is communicated symbolically or allegorically: a personified "Love" gives her to him and vice-versa. The lovers are separated from the inquisitive eye of the audience by a narrative

shroud over their most intimate moments, which is lifted only when intruders, such as Marjodoc or the King himself, encroach upon their privacy.<sup>23</sup>

The lovers find their greatest fulfillment, in all aspects of their relationship and especially on the sexual level, in the *minnegrotte*. Each is able to be "always at each other's side" (266) ("si wâren z'allen zîten / ein ander an der sîten," 17145–46), and therefore they are able to express their love fully and without intrusion. As Gottfried describes their lifestyle, the reader learns that they are at one with nature in this *locus amoenus*, and that they spend their time watching the spring water flow, sitting beneath a lime tree telling love tales of times past. When they grow weary of stories, they return to the *minnegrotte* and play music or sing sad and sweet love songs:

si wehselten unmuoze  
mit handen und mit zungen.  
sie harpheten, si sungen  
leiche unde noten der minne.  
sie wandelten dar inne  
ir wunnenspil, swie sî gezam.  
sweder ir die harphen genam,  
sô was des anderen site,  
daz ez diu notelîn dermite  
suoze unde senelîche sanc.  
ouch lîtete ietweder clanc  
der harphen unde der zungen,  
sô s'in ein ander clungen,  
sô suoze dar inne,  
als ez der süezen Minne  
wol z'einer clûse wart benant:  
la fossiure a la gent amant. (17208–24)

[They busied their hands and their tongues in turn. They performed amorous lays and their accompaniments, varying their delight as it suited them: for if one took the harp it was for the other to sing the tune with wistful tenderness. And indeed, the strains of both harp and tongue, merging their sound in each other, echoed in that cave so sweetly that it was dedicated to sweet Love for her retreat most fittingly as "La foissure a la gent amant." (267)]

These activities combine their talents and knowledge, merging their artistic aptitudes and verbal skills for the benefit of each other. They are partners in this relationship, contributing to the activities freely and without a sense of one

<sup>23</sup> In contrast, see the description and discussion of the "secret place" at which is held the "Tournament of the Penis" in the article by Albrecht Classen, "Sexual Desire and Pornography: Literary Imagination in a Satirical Context. Gender Conflict, Sexual Identity, and Misogyny in the 'Nonnenturnier,'" in this volume.

dominating the other. Although Tristan had been Isolde's teacher at an earlier time, she has become his equal in the arts,<sup>24</sup> and thus when they approach the altar of their love, the crystalline bed at the center of the cave,

swaz aber von der fossiure  
 von alter âventiure  
 vor hin ie was bemaeret,  
 daz wart an in bewaeret.  
 diu wîre wirtinne  
 diu haete sich dar inne  
 alrêste an ir spil verlân.  
 swaz ê dar inne ie wart getân  
 von kurzewîle oder von spil,  
 dazn lief niht ze disem zil.  
 ezn was niht von meine  
 sô lûter noch sô reine,  
 als ir spil was under in.  
 si triben der minne ir stunde hin  
 sô wol sô nie gelieben baz.  
 sine tâten niht wan allez daz,  
 dâ sî daz herze zuo getrouc. (17225–41)

[All that had been rumoured in tales of old on the subject of the grotto was borne out in this pair. Only now had the cave's true mistress given herself to her sport in earnest. Whatever frolics or pastimes had been pursued in this grotto before, they did not equal this; they were neither so pure nor so unsullied in spirit as when Tristan and Isolde disported themselves. These two beguiled Love's hour in a way no lovers surpassed—they did just as their hearts prompted them. (267)]

In order to set an appropriate mood for this passage, Gottfried has just spent several hundred lines explaining the structure of the *minnegrotte* as an allegory, wherein the materials and craftsmanship project the virtues of ideal love. Provocatively, Gottfried revisits the language that previously had been used to describe Brangäne's and Isolde's behavior in bed during the bed-trick scene. However, there is a radical difference here: the earlier, mercantile discourse of exchange has been salvaged—the references to tin and gold are not attached to the lovers' behavior, but rather to qualities of love that are given allegorical significance:

Daz tougenlîche heftelîn,  
 daz von ûzen hin in

<sup>24</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Abaelards *Historia Calamitatum*, der Briefwechsel mit Heloise und Gottfrieds von Straßburg *Tristan*: Historisch-biographische und fiktionale Schicksale. Eine Untersuchung zur Intertextualität im zwölften und dreizehnten Jahrhundert," *arcadia* 35, 2 (2000): 225–53.

zer vallen was geleitet hin,  
 daz was ein spinele von zin.  
 diu valle was von golde,  
 als sî ze rehte solde.  
 valle unde haft, diz unde daz,  
 diu enmohten beidiu niemer baz  
 an ir eigenschaft sîn brâht.  
 daz zin daz ist diu guote andâht  
 ze tougenlichem dinge.  
 daz golt daz ist diu linge.  
 zin unde golt sint wol hier an.  
 sîn andâht mag ein ieclich man  
 nâch sînem willen leiten,  
 smalen oder breiten,  
 kürzen oder lengen,  
 vrîen oder twengen  
 sus oder sô, her oder hin  
 mit lîhter arbeit alse zin  
 und ist dâ lützel schaden an.  
 swer aber mit rehter güete kan  
 ze minnen wesen gedanchaft,  
 den treit binamen dirre haft  
 von zine, dem swachen dinge,  
 ze guldîner linge  
 und ze lieber âventiure. (17030–57)

[The secret lever which had been let into the latch from without was a spindle of tin, while the latch was of gold, as it should be. Neither the one nor the other, latch nor lever, could have been better applied in respect to their innate virtues: tin means "Willing Thought for a secret affair of the heart, but gold stands for Success (*linge*). Tin and gold are appropriate here. Any man can mould his thoughts to his will, narrow, broaden, shorten, lengthen them, free them, or confine them, here or there, this way or that, with very little effort, as is the case with tin, and there is no great harm in that. But if a man can set his thoughts on love with a true will, this lever of humble tin will carry him on to golden success and the tender transports of love. (265)]<sup>25</sup>

The use of *linge* in this context causes one to stop and ponder. Is the success in love meant generally, or is there some specific way in which lovers are successful, and "gold" best describing it. If one understand success in the context of "good lovin'," as I have attempted to describe it above, it is likely that one equate "linge" with fulfillment in sexual passion; Rüdiger Krohn seems to lean in this direction as he translates *linge* with "Erfüllung" (17042). Melvin E. Valk<sup>26</sup> records altogether fifteen

<sup>25</sup> Here Hatto inserts the following footnote: "Some erotic double entendres are lost in translation."

<sup>26</sup> Melvin E. Valk, *Word-Index to Gottfried's Tristan* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958),



instances of “linge,” referring to satisfaction—it becomes the equivalent of *vröude*, *wunne*, or other expressions of joy at court (as a courtier) and success in battle (as a knight).<sup>27</sup> In fact, in every other instance it refers to concrete successes, the happiness resulting from the accomplishment of what one sets out to do physically. Aside from the passage in question, and with but one other exception, all refer to Tristan’s prowess. Hence, it would seem most correct to link the “golden success” referred to in this passage with Tristan’s and Isolde’s mutual satisfaction with one another during their “performances” on the altar of sexual love.

Most noticeably, references to power, inequality, and self-gratification are entirely missing. Furthermore, Gottfried’s silence on the act of love forces the reader to consider the lovers non-visually, i.e., not through their superficial physicality, but rather as a “mythic” presence, better comprehended through symbol and metaphor. The reader does not have to deal with the substance of the lovers, and thus, her/his mind’s eye is freed from the flesh to enjoy the transcendent pleasures of the lovers’ spiritual intercourse—carrying the audience from the level of worldly events to that of mystical experience. This feature differentiates the lovers in the *minnegrotte* from Tristan’s parents on Riwalin’s sick bed: we do not see the coital act in the Cave, but we are elevated to a higher level of ennobled sexuality. Therefore, sex, the physical realization of the lovers’ experience of one another, becomes the catalyst that transforms the reading/listening act into a spiritual one, where the message of the Discourse on Love becomes available as immediate experience to each member of the community of *edele herzen*.<sup>28</sup> These “noble hearts” are described in the prologue of the epic poem as those elite members of the courtly society who can accept the simultaneity of joy and sorrow in love, to whom Gottfried has dedicated his version of the *Tristan* tale because they are capable of understanding its spiritual/mystical message.

A final example of a significant sexual encounter between Tristan and Isolde occurs close to where Gottfried breaks off his narrative, at the point where the lovers are discovered *in flagrante delicto* by Mark (18129–61). This scene reports Isolde’s increasing desire and the steps she takes to achieve gratification. The text presents the image of noonday sunshine for comparison with Isolde’s longing for sex:

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42. See also Clifton D. Hall, *A Complete Concordance to Gottfried von Strassburg’s Tristan* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 152, who confirms this statistic.

<sup>27</sup> See the study on courtly joy by Siegfried Christoph, “The Language and Culture of Joy,” *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 347 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 319–33.

<sup>28</sup> See the Introduction to *Words of Love* by Albrecht Classen, 1–51.

ez was an einem mitten tage  
 und schien diu sunne sêre,  
 leider ûf ir êre.  
 zweier hande sunne schîn  
 der gleiste der künigîn  
 in ir herze und in ir sinne:  
 diu sunne und diu minne.  
 der senede muot, diu heize zît  
 diu muoten sî inwiderstrît.  
 sus wolte sî dem strîte,  
 dem muote unde der zîte  
 mit einem liste entwichen sîn  
 und viel inmitten dar in. (18126–38)

[It was noon, and the sun was shining strongly, alas, upon their honour. Two kinds of sunshine, the sun and love, shone into the Queen's heart and soul. Her languor and the noonday heat vied with each other to distress her. She therefore intended by some means or other to elude this dissention between her mood and the hour—and was soon deep in trouble. (279)]

And what trouble they encounter! She sends for Tristan, he arrives, they make love; and again we obtain no description of how they make love, only that “the doors were shut” just as the textual focus turns to Brangæne's thoughts as the lady-in-waiting stands guard outside the lovers' door. When the suspicious king arrives to view the proof of their involvement, the description once again returns to arms, hands, shoulders, breasts—the bodies dissected—but also closely locked together, entwined such that the king has no further suspicions but only certainty. Tristan longed for sex with such ardor at an earlier point in the text, and his foolish insistence on leaping from his bed to Isolde's caused a recently bled vein to open and betray his act to Mark. Again, in Gottfried's epic poem it seems that such ardor leads to disaster, here resulting in the final, permanent banishment of Tristan from Mark's court and Isolde's presence.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Editor's note: This is not an uncommon topic in medieval love discourse, see, for instance, the outcome of *Equitan*, one of the *Lais* by Marie de France. But we might have to distinguish between an ardor resulting from purely physical desire, as in *Equitan*, and an ardor resulting from an almost divine inspiration of love, as in *Tristan*. Mark might be guilty of *cupiditas*, whereas Tristan and Isolde seem to have achieved the goal of perfectly blending *eros* and *agape*. See Alfred Karnein, “Krankheit, Sünde, Leidenschaft,” id., *Amor est passio: Untersuchungen zum nicht-höfischen Liebesdiskurs des Mittelalters*, ed. Friedrich Wolfzettel. Hesperides. Letterature e culture occidentali, IV (Triest: Edizioni Parnaso, 1997), 57–72. In light of Clason's discussion, however, the book title chosen by Wolfzettel for Karnein's articles seems inappropriate since sexuality was very much part of the courtly discourse of love, as all contributions to this volume demonstrate. See also the truly eye-opening studies contained in *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006).

#### 4. Conclusion: Profane and Sublime Love

In this paper I have considered the quality of love-making in the great German courtly epic of illicit love, Gottfried's *Tristan*. Although we witness intense sexual moments among several characters, very little is revealed about particular aspects of the central figures' sex lives. As we have seen further, the rhetorical flourishes characteristic of the lovers' love is absent in that of the less sublime relationships—in fact, the more profane the relationship, the more the audience is permitted to visualize via concrete, descriptive language. This perspective emphasizes the spiritual dimension of sexuality in this work, which informs every line: love between “noble hearts,” the sort of hearts possessed by Tristan and Isolde, is expressed through sexuality as a kind of sacrament, an outward sign of an inner, spiritual transformation, and in the act of love the participants actually do achieve a divine experience. In this combination of the lower and higher levels, the lovers are able to reach the most important goal of mysticism—the realization of transcendence here on earth.

Of course, this meaning of “profane” reflects its etymological origins, the sense of *prō fānō*, “outside of the temple”—outside of the *fanum*, the place where the initiated can dwell in the knowledge of the love-rite. Tristan and Isolde dwell *intra fanum*—“within the temple” of the *minnegrotte*, the three-dimensional concretization of this sublime love. The initiates in the rite of love, who can accept all aspects of love—not merely the eroticism and gratification, but also the pain and suffering that accompanies the joy of true love—are lovers in the mould of Tristan and Isolde. They practice and accept this good love as a spiritual value, higher even than the royal marriage of Mark and Isolde and the erotically charged encounter of Tristan's parents. Gottfried uses language to bring these initiates, the *edele herzen* described in the Prologue, ever closer to this mystical goal, all they really need: ‘Good Lovin’.

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## The Limits of Reading Innuendo in Medieval Literature

One of the inherent dilemmas in hermeneutics is the desire, on the one hand, to bring meaning to what seems at first sight meaningless, while—at the same time—respecting the right of the text, if not the intention of the author, to be ambiguous. In most cases, ambiguity involves the potential for multiple readings based on equivocation.

In rhetoric, ambiguity is generally considered to be intentional or accidental. In both cases, an ambiguous reading is based upon multiple meanings, which in turn permit several plausible readings depending on various contexts. The context may be linguistic or situational. The extent to which a reader is sensitive to ambiguous meaning rests largely on knowledge of and about the various potential contexts. Where the context is obscure, ambiguity cannot be resolved easily without the construction of alternate contexts. If the context remains obscure, then ambiguity “wird . . . als eine chaotische Erscheinung des Zufalls des betreffenden Sprachsystems gedeutet” (Ambiguity is considered a chaotic, accidental feature of the respective linguistic system [my translation]).<sup>1</sup>

If the ambiguity is deemed to be an intentionally employed trope, then the author may provide a signal to alert the audience: “Die Äquivokität bedarf, wenn sie als Kunstmittel zwecks ästhetischer Verfremdung oder aus Notwendigkeit verwandt wird, einer gewissen, die *perspicuitas* garantierenden Milderung. Diese Milderung ist ein Signal, das dazu dient, den gemeinten Wortinhalt von dem durch das äquivoke Wort ebenfalls evozierten, aber nicht gemeinten Wortinhalt zu unterscheiden” (If it is used as a device for aesthetic alienation or out of

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik*, 4th ed (Munich: Max Hueber, 1971), 56. See also William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1953), Irène Rosier, ed., *L'Ambiguïté: Cinq études historique*, Histoire de la Linguistique (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1988), Harald Weydt, “Le Concept d’ambiguïté en grammaire transformationnelle et en linguistique fonctionnelle,” *La Linguistique* 8 (1972): 41–72, and Giuseppe Caglioti, *The Dynamics of Ambiguity* (Berlin: Springer, 1992).

necessity, ambiguity requires a certain amelioration to assure perspicuity. This amelioration is a signal which serves to differentiate the intended meaning from the unintended, but evoked, meaning).<sup>2</sup> This signal in the direction of audience is the essence of innuendo in its etymological derivation from Latin *innuere*, 'nod to, signify.' While innuendo in modern usage is most often associated with rumor and slander,<sup>3</sup> the use of sexual innuendo harkens back to the original sense of suggestiveness directed at an audience. Innuendo is therefore inherently intentional and, as such, has important implications for our reading of texts. While all ambiguity has the potential to be read as innuendo, intentionality is implicit in the various interpretive approaches we take in assigning relative importance to primary as opposed to proposed secondary meaning(s). Innuendo as a consciously employed device turns the audience into what Lausberg called a "Gedanken-Komplize des Autors" (notional accomplice of the author). The problem in recognizing and interpreting innuendo is the difficulty in deciding what instance of presumed ambiguity is intentional as opposed to accidental. This is particularly the case when dealing with literary texts removed in time and place from our own linguistic and situational contexts. In many cases the modern reader may stipulate a semantic or situational context which justifies an ambiguous reading and, not infrequently, moves from there to an intentional argument.

The terrain on which these considerations coincide is brambly indeed when it comes to reading ambiguous references to sexuality in medieval texts.<sup>4</sup> The problem is not, of course, the nature or reality of sexuality in the Middle Ages *per se*. The problem is, rather, whether and how sexuality is made the subject of, or is referred to, in texts which are not categorized — in whole or large part — as 'ribald' or 'bawdy.' It is one thing to deal with the more or less overt sexual references in the Old French *fabliaux* or Middle High German *Schwänke*, but in its larger context and tone, there is nothing 'bawdy' about Walther von der Vogelweide's lovely post-coital poem, "Unter der Linden."<sup>5</sup>

The matter of reading sexual innuendo in(to) texts or passages which do not, at least at first sight, lend themselves to sexual interpretations can lead to interesting readings. An example is offered in a relatively simple descriptive passage from a late Arthurian Middle High German romance, Konrad von Stoffeln's *Gauriel von Muntabel* (late thirteenth century). Having described in some detail the construction and decoration of Gauriel's bed, Konrad adds the following note on

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<sup>2</sup> Lausberg, *Elemente*, 57.

<sup>3</sup> David M. Bell, "Innuendo," *Journal of Pragmatics* 27 (1997): 35–59, distinguishes between "nonvenomous" and "venomous" innuendo.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Suzanne Kocher's contribution to this volume.

<sup>5</sup> For a general discussion, see A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

its marvelous qualities: "[ . . . ] swer an dem / lac und niht rette. / den kunde niemen gesehen. / ouch wil ich iu verjehen: / swer müede und kranc dar ane kam, / der wart gesunt und wunnesam" ("But whoever lay on this bed / and did not speak / could not be seen by anyone. / I will also tell you in truth: / whoever went to this bed tired and weak, / he recovered and was refreshed," 211–16).<sup>6</sup> Brigitte Schöning offers the following comment on this scene: "Deutlicher ist eine Masturbationsphantasie kaum noch zu charakterisieren" ("It would be hard to describe a more obvious masturbation phantasy").<sup>7</sup> It would be reasonable to ask what sign, absent a specific linguistic or situational context, justifies the sexual reading as being plausible, even compelling.

We are here in the area of ambiguity, of double meaning. More particularly, we are in the realm of a kind of double meaning which, it has been decided, hints at sexual meaning. While any reading may be possible, it does not follow that every reading is therefore plausible, much less compelling. If there is the potential, or strong suggestion, of a double meaning which implies a sexual reference, then we are in the gray area of sexual innuendo.<sup>8</sup>

I would like to explore a set of criteria, in no particular order of importance, with which to outline both the potential for, and limits of, reading sexual innuendo. Although most of the material comes from Middle High German, readers will have no difficulty in coming up with similar examples in their respective literatures.

When considering the potential for sexual innuendo, it seems prudent to bear in mind the several levels of possible meanings. The explicitly sexual reference is beyond the innuendo, since no signal is required to differentiate different levels of meaning. As Sheila Delany put it in her 1994 study of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*: "What I have looked for is places where an anal or genital interpretation of a word, line, or image is clearly not the first level of meaning, but where a sexual innuendo is created alongside the literal and non-sexual sense, usually by the presence of a cluster of ambiguous words or suggestive images."<sup>9</sup>

The important point here is that the sexual meaning is not the primary meaning. It is the nature of the situation which admits to a secondary, a sexual meaning. If the sexual meaning, or putative intent, were primary, then it would be a matter of

<sup>6</sup> Konrad von Stoffeln, *Gauriel von Muntabel*, trans. Siegfried Christoph (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Brigitte Schöning, 'Friedrich von Schwaben'. *Aspekte des Erzählens im spätmittelalterlichen Versroman*. Erlanger Studien, 90 (Erlangen: Palm & Encke, 1991), 213.

<sup>8</sup> For a general discussion of *Anspielung*, used more narrowly in the sense of 'allusion,' see the article in the *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Harald Fricke et al. (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1997), s.v., 93–96.

<sup>9</sup> *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). See also Ian Lancashire, "Sexual Innuendo in the Reeve's Tale," *The Chaucer Review* 6 (1972): 159–70.

salaciousness or bawdy, not innuendo.<sup>10</sup> The potential for innuendo can be seen quite clearly, for example, in the way in which the *Minnegrotte* in Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan* is described, at least according to one critic, as a "zweifelsfreie, gewagte Allegorie des Liebesaktes" (an incontrovertible, daring allegory of coitus).<sup>9</sup> The argument derives from, or leads to, the conclusion that the Middle High German words *valle* and *heftelin*, the grotto's inner door latch and outer opener, respectively, also mean "und hier in erster Linie 'vagina' und 'membrum virile'" (and here principally 'vagina' and virile member).<sup>10</sup>

We are here back in Konrad von Stoffeln's alleged, or concrete, masturbation phantasy, I think. The implication in both cases is that the sexual meaning is somehow inescapably evident. The issue is not whether the *Minnegrotte* is in some allegorical sense representative of the sexual act, but a) whether the invocation of 'allegory' is meant somehow to sanctify the sexual context, and—no less importantly—b) whether the elevation of subsidiary meaning to primary meaning is not arguing from a conclusion. In other words: If the dictionaries do not reference 'sexual' readings of 'latch' and 'key,' then the meanings are imposed through the context of an intentional (modern) sexual reading. Or perhaps the reader of the lines was inspired by the no less hotly contested Shakespearean *Sonnet 52*: "So am I as the rich, whose blessed key / Can bring him to his sweet up-locked treasure."<sup>11</sup> The relative supremacy of meaning is, I think, critically important in the justification for reading sexual innuendo.

The early thirteenth-century Middle High German poet Wolfram von Eschenbach (flourished around 1200–1220), a consummate wordsmith, offers a fine example of a context which illustrates the potential for sexual meaning, and hence innuendo, by maintaining a careful balance between primary and secondary meanings.<sup>12</sup> When young Parzival in the eponymous romance (ca.1205), a

<sup>10</sup> See Albrecht Classen's contribution to this volume ("Sexual Desire and Pornography"); in his case all the literary examples are explicitly beyond the level of innuendo; see also his discussion of the obscene in the introduction to this volume. Further, consult *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Woodbridge, Suffolk, and Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Werner Betz, "Gottfried von Strassburg als Kritiker höfischer Kultur und Advokat religiöser und erotischer Emanzipation," *Festschrift für Konstantin Reichardt*, ed. Christian Gellinek (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1969), 168–73; here 171. See also Hugo Bekker, *Gottfried von Straßburg's 'Tristan'. Journey through the Realm of Eros*. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture, 29 (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Betz, "Gottfried von Strassburg als Kritiker," 171.

<sup>11</sup> On this point, see Stanley Wells, *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2004), and Ian Donaldson, "Shakespeare's Serious Indecency," *Essays in Criticism* 24 (1974): 363–67.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfram was certainly capable of, and not averse to, making titillating references. See for example James Marchand, "Wolfram's Bawdy," *Monatshefte* 69 (1977): 131–49, and Blake Lee Spahr, "Gahmuret's Erection: Rising to Adventure," *Monatshefte* 83 (1991): 403–13.

handsome and strapping lad, is finished with his bath and massage, administered by a bevy of gorgeous young ladies, he is offered but refuses a bathrobe. Wolfram is careful to point out that the boy is too modest and shy, “sus kunder sich bî frouwen schemn” (167,23; “so bashful was he in the presence of ladies,” 94)<sup>13</sup> to accept the bathrobe. There is nothing sexual about this as such, though it is only Parzival’s innocence that protects him from the obvious question: How can standing stark naked before a group of young ladies be considered ‘modest’ or ‘shy’? In any event, the ladies leave. Then Wolfram addresses his audience directly: “ich wæn si gerne heten gesehn, ob im dort unde iht wære geschehn” (167, 27–28; “I fancy they would have liked to have seen whether he had sustained any harm down below,” 94).

An argument can be made for ambiguity here, since—under the most innocent of circumstances—‘down below’ could refer to fallen arches, bunions, or bruised shins. The reference may also be sexual, however, i.e., it may refer to Parzival’s ‘privates,’ and this degree of ambiguity raises it to the level of innuendo. Between primary and secondary readings, between innocuous and sexual meaning, there lies the province of that special circumstance of ambiguity that admits to a reading of sexual innuendo.

For sexual innuendo, I would like to propose the following criteria, then:

1. There has to be a reasonable degree of certainty that a sexual context is attested for what we want to propose as innuendo. This degree of certainty is, in turn, based on two types, both of which strongly imply a sexual context:
  - a. The first is a specific word or phrase for which a plausible, attested sexual meaning exists. Examples in Middle High German are words like *scham* (‘shame’ and ‘pudendum’), *grans* (‘bird beak’ and ‘vulva’), *lit* (‘body/family member’ or ‘penis’), and more.
  - b. The second type is a word or phrase which, while not attested in a sexual meaning, nonetheless permits a sexual interpretation within a context with sexual potential. The difficulty here is that the stipulation of a potential sexual context may lead to a reading which imputes sexual meaning where none may exist and hence none may be intended. In other words: the sword which separates Tristan and Isolde in the *Minnegrotte* may well have an added—sexual—significance given what the lovers do in the grotto and the impression of chasteness they are clearly trying to make on intruders. That does not make every sword a penis, nor, for that matter, does it make every sword fight a homosexual encounter.

<sup>13</sup> All *Parzival*-citations from Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe, ed. Karl Lachmann (1926; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964). English translations based on Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (New York: Penguin, 1980). Unless otherwise noted, all *Parzival* translations refer to Hatto.



We might call this cautionary approach to reading sexual innuendo the 'Aristotelean' problem: If everything is green, then nothing is green. If everything is seen to have sexual potential, then a point is soon reached where nothing is sexual anymore. The key is in recognizing a potential contrast between primary and secondary meanings which is relevant to a given context; not to eliminate the primary, innocuous meaning in favor of the sexual meaning, but rather to explore the extent to which both, or all, meanings are relevant in several distinct semantic environments.

2. An element of ambiguity which allows both, or even several, meanings of the word or phrase to be read within sexual and non-sexual contexts, respectively. An example is a pun in *Parzival* that Wolfram cannot resist explaining, and which is hence clearly intentional. He describes a lady dressed in sparsely in rags: *nantes iemen vilân, / der het ir unreht getân: / wan si hete wenc an ir* (257, 23–25; "it would have been wrong to call her an overdressed villager, since she had little on," 136).<sup>14</sup>

A secondary feature of sexual innuendo is that it causes one to reevaluate a preceding remark which, in view of the possible innuendo, suggests a more than innocent reading. Immediately prior to the pun on *vilân*, Wolfram points out that, however one approached the lady, it was *zer blôzen sîten*, which could either refer to the 'unarmed side' or, especially in retrospect, to the 'bare' or 'naked' side.

3. A generic metacontext in which the sexual inference may be defensible, but in which the sexual does not constitute the primary, genre-bound aim of the text or even the situation. The distinction can be important, since it can lead to qualitative judgments about a work on the basis of how much explicit or implicit sexual content there is.

Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius* (1187/1189 or between 1190 and 1197), for example, has at its heart two separate instances of incest. Gregorius is the product of an incestuous relationship between brother and sister, and Gregorius himself eventually, and unwittingly, marries his own mother. And yet, the relative prominence of the incest taboo is only to set the stage for the fatalistic consequences of breaking a taboo, and to prepare the audience, and Gregorius, for the mystery and magnitude of God's grace.

Hartmann's *Erec* (around 1205), to take another example, compromises his knighthood and, by extension, his marriage by succumbing to idleness (*verligen*)

<sup>14</sup> The pun is based on the play on *vilân*, 'peasant', and *vil an*, 'much on' in the sense of wearing much. Wolfram pushes the point of the pun even further by shifting the expected reason for the injustice, i.e., calling a lady a peasant, to the unexpected conclusion opened by the pun on *vilân*, i.e., saying that she was fully dressed when she was, in fact, barely covered in tattered rags.

after marriage. It is fairly clear that Eric's idleness was occasioned by a fondness for sleeping in with his beautiful new bride. Nonetheless, the issue is not the salaciousness of Erec and Enite writhing in perpetual consummation of their marriage, but rather the fact that this 'crisis' precipitates the events prefatory to the second cycle of redemptive adventures.

This is a far cry from those stories which have as their central point one or another aspect of carnal lust, like some of the short stories of Hans Folz, Heinrich Kaufringer, or Hans Rosenplüt.<sup>15</sup> Colleagues in French will, of course, have the *fabliaux* to refer to for any number of examples of innuendo leading from seduction to what Norris Lacy called "sex that is quick, easy, and soon forgotten."<sup>16</sup>

The 'proper' time and place for sexual innuendo is also an important factor. Innuendo is largely superfluous once a sexual encounter has been established or agreed on by both parties. Innuendo is most successful to explore the possibility of a sexual encounter, or at least to communicate one's attitude toward the possibility of such an encounter. Ambiguous terms may be more about euphemisms than innuendo, i.e., they may be a matter of culturally conditioned circumlocution rather than an intentional signaling to the audience of double meaning.

Innuendo also implies a difference between a sexual and erotic reading. For my purpose, I distinguish sexual reference as one which singles out acts, or organs, involved in acts of sexual copulation in its various manifestations. I realize that this involves areas of what at one time or another, in various places, and by different individuals would be considered perverted practices. However, I think we can agree that the distinction between perverted and normal is as personally fluid as it is culturally shifting and relative. If nothing else, for example, the Kinsey reports offered a burst of color to the grayness of missionary, procreative

<sup>15</sup> For a selection and NHG translation of salient examples, see Wolfgang Spiewok, *Deutsche Novellen des Mittelalters II. Sexuelle Derbheiten* (Greifswald: Reineke, 1994). See now also an English translation of a specific type of narratives that are of relevance for our case, *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*, selected and trans. by Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 328 (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Norris J. Lacy, "Sex and Love in the Fabliaux," *Sex, Love and Marriage in Medieval Literature and Reality*, ed. Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok. *Greifswalder Beiträge zum Mittelalter*, 56 (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 1996), 41–46; here 41. See also Sidney E. Berger, "Sex in the Literature of the Middle Ages: The Fabliaux," *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982), 162–75. Now see also *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A. Crocker. *Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and Klaus Grubmüller, *Die Ordnung, der Witz und das Chaos: Eine Geschichte der europäischen Novellistik im Mittelalter: Fabliau – Märe – Novelle* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006). For Italian literature, see Christopher Kleinhenz, "Texts, Naked and Thinly Veiled: Erotic Elements in Medieval Italian Literature," *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury (New York: Garland, 1991), 83–109. For Spanish literature, see Sanford Shepard, "Undercurrent and Innuendo in the 'Troba Casurra' of Juan Ruiz," *Neohelicon* 17 (1990): 281–89.

'normalcy.' There is no reason to believe that people in the Middle Ages took a fundamentally different approach to sexuality in that respect.

If we leapfrog past the Middle Ages into classical antiquity, the line between normalcy and perversion becomes even more artificial and hide-bound by the moral preoccupation of the Victorians.<sup>17</sup> While sexual readings presuppose a virtually universal approach to organs and acts, the erotic differs significantly in its object, aim, and subjectivity, both culturally and individually. The erotic may well be an expression of, and impulse to, sexual phantasy, but its very specificity and subjectivity makes it difficult to posit intent as sexual innuendo.<sup>18</sup>

The last element of innuendo, and again one that is related to the ambiguity and relative primacy of meanings, is what I would like to call 'deniability.' This is, I believe, a key element of what constitutes sexual innuendo. To the degree that words or phrases, in a particular context, may admit at least two types of interpretation, i.e., non-sexual and sexual, it is important for deniability to serve as a kind of semantic 'safe haven' for the author or speaker of innuendo. After all: When exploring the potential for a sexual context, it is very helpful to have a 'fall-back' position for the deliberate innuendo, to revert to a misunderstanding of the primary meaning. In fact, the deniability of having intended sexual innuendo allows the tables to be turned, as it were, on the reader/listener. In other words: If you take what I said to be sexual innuendo, it is your problem, or at least a manifestation of your own preoccupation with sex, not mine.

This last point cannot be emphasized too strongly, since deniability may dissuade many a reader from positing sexual innuendo, for fear of being accused of finding sex where there is none, or at least none intended, as witnessed by Brigitte Schöning's and Werner Betz' sexual readings, respectively. Deniability is furthermore a feature of innuendo which justifies two very different kinds of demeanor on the part of the author/speaker.

There is, first, the deniability of the naïf, where the speaker is genuinely shocked to find that his or her words have been taken 'out of context.' Second, there is the sexual innuendo which is crafted with sufficient wit and care to afford perfect

<sup>17</sup> It is not coincidental, perhaps, that the distinction between 'carnal' and 'ennobling' love, German *hohe minne* and *niedere minne*, and the very concept of courtly love, French *amour courtoise*, are largely epistemological constructs of the late nineteenth century. See, for example, John C. Moore, "'Courtly Love': A Problem of Terminology," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979): 621–32; see also Dorothea Wiercinski, *Minne: Herkunft und Anwendungsgeschichte eines Worte*. Niederdeutsche Studien, 11 (Cologne: Böhlau, 1964). On the Middle High German concepts of *hohe* and *niedere mine*, see Hubert Heinen, "Lofty and Base Love in Walther von der Vogelweide's 'So die bluomen' and 'Aller werdekeit'," *German Quarterly* 51 (1978): 465–75.

<sup>18</sup> For a selection of relevant texts on this discussion see *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (1994; Mason, OH: Thomson Custom Publishing, 1999). For further discussions of French *fabliaux* in light of my approach, see the contributions to *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2008); see the review by Albrecht Classen, *Mediaevistik*, forthcoming.

deniability on the surface while offering a distinctly plausible, and context-sensitive, nudge, nod, and/or wink to those who can read behind the lines. In proverbial terms: "dictum sapienti sat est" (a pointing finger is enough for the wise).<sup>19</sup>

Our sensitivity to understanding sexual innuendo and its deniability, at least on the author's part, was given a fundamentally new impulse by the work of Sigmund Freud, of whom W. H. Auden very perceptibly wrote: "[T]o us he is no more a person / now but a whole climate of opinion / under whom we conduct our different lives."<sup>20</sup> Freud unraveled the subconscious, and its essential sexuality, as a motive force independent of conscious rationalization. The essence of the 'Freudian slip' is very much a part of innuendo. On the one hand it became increasingly difficult to deny the sexual intentionality of innuendo by claiming ignorance or innocence. On the other hand, it became increasingly possible, if not always popular, to invest almost any word or phrase with sexual meaning. In particular, the naïf could no longer claim as easily that no innuendo was intended.

So what is the point of sexual innuendo in literature which is not intended to be merely salacious? One possibility is that the essence of sexual innuendo is the tension which it highlights, produces, and which can often only be resolved, at least at the level of literature, by the shared relief and recognition signaled by laughter, groaning, smiling, or guffawing, depending on how the innuendo strikes us. If literature thrives on conflict, and tension is one aspect of that conflict, then it is in a sense only natural that sexual innuendo should be an integral part of the arsenal of which the author avails him- or herself, and with which he engages the audience.

Nor should we forget the performative aspect of so much of medieval literature. The very idea of the 'nod' implicit in innuendo establishes a dynamic relationship between performer and audience.<sup>21</sup> This is exemplified nicely in Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: "If the hearers have been fatigued by listening, we shall open with something that may provoke laughter—a fable, a plausible fiction, a caricature, an ironical inversion of the meaning of a word, an ambiguity, innuendo, banter, a naivety, an exaggeration, a recapitulation, a pun, an unsuspected turn, a novel tale, a historical anecdote, a verse, or a challenge or a smile of approbation directed at some one."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For this and other medieval proverbs, see Hans Walther, *Proverbia sententiaeque latinitatis medii aevi. Lateinische Sprichwörter und Sentenzen des Mittelalters*, Carmina Medii Aevi posterioris Latina, 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963–1983).

<sup>20</sup> "In memory of Sigmund Freud," *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), 217.

<sup>21</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Julia Wingo Shinnickl.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan. Loeb Classical Library, 403 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 27.

At this point I should probably restate my intention for these remarks. I do not wish to deny sexual innuendo per se, wherever or in whatever form it is read. Nor do I want to make a particular case for the ubiquity of sexual innuendo. Instead, I am interested in considering what constitutes innuendo, and how a plausible case for reading it, rather than a more innocuous message, can be made.

The language of sexual innuendo, i.e., potentially multiple meanings, is to a great extent a function of the texts available, and our specific knowledge of the cultural (sub)context in which specific words and phrases could signal ambiguity.

This is not always the case, of course. As in the example of young Parzival's bath, there may be no ambiguity as such, and the potential sexual connotation may be situational. In other words, we do not have to attest a secondary meaning for 'down below' to read the passage as being suggestive. In other words: Whether 'down below' refers to the genitalia or some other, more innocuous, extremity does not depend on whether there is a textual corpus which allows us to gloss 'down below' as penis. The innuendo derives from the situation more so than the term(s) used.

This can be illustrated further through another example from English, from Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*: "'Fondling', she saith, 'since I have hemm'd thee here / Within the circuit of this ivory pale, I'll be a park, / and thou shalt be my deer: / Feed where thou wilt, on mountain, or in dale; / Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry, / Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie.'"<sup>23</sup> If we posit a sexual context for these lines, it is not based on the secondary meaning of specific words or phrases. Instead, it is based on the situational context, the image which it evokes of caressing the female body, though particular aspects of this caressing journey necessarily means that 'pleasant fountains' or 'dry hills' have subsidiary meanings in a primarily sexual sense. In such readings the Aristotelean problem lurks.

What happens often, as I suspect in the case of the earlier masturbation phantasy in *Gauriel*, is that a sexual reading of context leads to semantic inference. In a sense it is an argument from a conclusion. Since the situational context is deemed to be sexual, then the words which describe it must also have sexual meaning.

This is precisely the problem of reading the 'Minnegrotte' in *Tristan*, i.e., the meanings of *valle* and *heftelîn*, and it becomes particularly thorny from the perspective of sexual innuendo. Neither Matthias Lexer nor Benecke/Müller/Zarncke, the standard Middle High German dictionaries,<sup>24</sup> list a

<sup>23</sup> William Shakespeare, "Venus and Adonis," 229–34, Classic Literature Library ebook available online at: <http://william-shakespeare.classic-literature.co.uk/venus-and-adonis/> (last accessed on March 31, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> *Mittelhochdeutsches Wörterbuch. Mit Benutzung des Nachlasses von Georg Friedrich Benecke ausgearbeitet von Wilhelm Müller und Friedrich Zarncke*, 4 vols. and index (1854–1866; Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1990); Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1992).

meaning for the terms even remotely sexual. This does not negate the possibility of such meaning. For one thing, the nineteenth-century compilers of Middle High German dictionaries may not have included certain meanings for moral reasons. It is also possible, of course, that the word can later be demonstrated to have a subsidiary sexual meaning. The best example for this is, perhaps, the language of gay culture in the Middle Ages. Despite the prominence of 'queer theory,' there remains much yet to be learned about the (sub)cultural language of medieval homosexuality.<sup>25</sup>

And this leads us right back to the matter of sexual innuendo. The 'nod' toward the audience, the hallmark of an innuendo's deliberately ambiguous intent, implies a community of shared meaning, of complicity—as it were—in the construction, delivery, and reading of the innuendo. A neologism would by its very nature make fairly poor material for sexual innuendo if there were not some fairly clear, extra-linguistic, indication that a verbal game is being played with intentional ambiguity.

An example of this is the episode in Wolfram's *Parzival*, when Gawain seduces the beautiful Antikonie.<sup>26</sup> What happens is anything but ambiguous. In Hatto's translation: "[Gawan] thrust his hand beneath her cloak and I fancy stroked her soft thigh—this only sharpened his torment. The man and the maid were so hard-pressed by desire that if malevolent eyes had not espied it a thing would have been done that both were intent on" (405,27; 209). In retrospect, it might have been clear what this was leading to. The greeting kiss was an early sign: "ir munt was heiz, dick unde rô't" (405,19; "her mouth was hot, full, and red," Hatto 208). Their "süezer rede" (405,24; "charming and sincere conversation," 209) conversation consists of his "bete" and her "versagen" (405,27; "entreaties" and "denials," 209). Everyone else leaves the room, the ladies remembering that they had other things

<sup>25</sup> For recent general studies, see *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger. Medieval Cultures Series, 27 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Richard E. Zeikowitz, "Befriending the Medieval Queer: A Pedagogy for Literature Classes," *College English* 65 (2002): 67–80; Tyson Pugh, *Queering Medieval Genres* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), and the rather polemic Anna Klosowska, *Queer Love in the Middle Ages* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), reviewed by Albrecht Classen, forthcoming in *Mediaevistik*. See also James A. Schultz, "Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 15 (2006): 14–29. The socio-political dimensions of 'queer theory', particularly in academic discourse, affect many 'readings' of literary texts, and the philological bases for such readings often remain questionable. See, for example, Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), writes of 'queer theory' as "resistance to regimes of the normal" (xxvii).

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the episode with reference to sexual innuendo, see Neil Thomas, "Sense and Structure in the Gawain Adventures of Wolfram's 'Parzival,'" *Modern Languages Review* 76 (1981): 848–56.

to do, “si giengn und schuofen umb ir pflege” (406,25). The stray hand on the thigh was not, then, entirely unexpected.

What gives pause is the seemingly aphoristic thought that passes through Gawan’s mind as he decides to take the plunge, as it were, namely that “dicke den grôzen strûz / væhet ein vil kranker ar” (406,30–407,1; “a very small eagle may take the great ostrich,” 209). Here, the sexual situation reflects back on possible secondary meaning(s) where none were readily apparent at first reading.

The Middle High German adjective for the eagle is actually *kranc*, ‘sickly, weak.’ Given the situation, it is perhaps natural to look at this expression and ask whether some innuendo is not being hinted at here. While there is no secondary meaning as such for *kranc* in a sexual sense, there is the expression *krancheit begân*, “to commit indecency.”<sup>27</sup> One can see where this leads: An alleged sexual situation encourages the promotion of a secondary, or even tertiary, reading in which the ambiguous or puzzling is infused with an air of innuendo. To read the lines then as ‘an aroused eagle can take on a big ostrich’ is possible, but certainly not compelling in the nudge, nod, and wink category. For that we can turn to another example involving Parzival, the Jeschute-episode.

Early on, when the young, naive hero comes upon the beautiful Lady Jeschute, resting in her tent, he greets her, in part as instructed by his mother, by leaping on the bed, wresting a ring from her finger, a brooch from her shift, and planting an enthusiastic kiss on her. While Parzival may not have had anything sexual in mind, Wolfram makes it quite clear that she was fit for love’s battle, with “einen munt durchliuhtic rô, / und gerndes ritters herzen nô” (130,5–6; “a mouth of translucent red, torment to the hearts of amorous knights,” 76). To make matters worse, her blanket was pushed down to her waist, owing to the heat, to which Wolfram adds—somewhat enigmatically, it seems—that it (*the* heat, *her* heat?) was “da si der wirt al eine liez” (130,20; “on account of her lord’s departure,” 76). Even though Parzival is to her like an entire army, the battle (“ringen,” 131,21) raged awhile.

Next, young Parzival complains about being hungry, “der knappe klagete’n hunger sân” (131,22). To this the Lady, once again described as being radiantly beautiful (“ir liebes lieht,” 131,23), responds: “ir solt mân ezzen niht. / wært ir ze vrumen wîse, / ir næmt iu ander spîse” (131,24–26; “Don’t eat me! [ . . . ] If you had any sense you would choose some other food,” 77).

We look back at what has happened just before, and a perspective opens up—if it has not already been opened up—in which the heat, the parted full lips, the pushed-down coverlet, the wrestling match on the bed for the ring and pin, where all these details begin to add up to a potential sexual situation. But is it a sexually charged situation? If it is not, then Jeschute’s anxiety (‘don’t eat me!’) is perfectly

<sup>27</sup> Matthias Lexers *Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch*, 33rd ed. (1882; Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1972), 374.

understandable. A young lad, dressed in fool's garb, wrestling with her, may well be "ein garzûn / gescheiden von den witzen," (139,6-7; "a page who had lost his reason," 77), and anything could happen. While the fact that young Parzival may have "lost his reason" offers deniability, i.e., he might not have had the wit to engage in the innuendo of sexual appetite, Jeschute's reaction, both verbal and physical, at least permits the reading of a sexual context.

Potentiality is on the sexual innuendo side here, but just barely. Until, that is, Wolfram follows it up with a version of the wink, nod, and nudge. Having suffered the lad's advances, Wolfram tells us that Jeschute's "scham begunde switzen."<sup>28</sup> Albert Wimmer translates the line as: 'shame made her sweat'.<sup>29</sup> Hatto's translation is similar: "For sheer embarrassment she was breaking out in a sweat." This is not what the text says, however. The text says, quite literally, that 'her shame began to sweat.' If her 'shame' began to sweat, as it were, then perhaps Parzival's advances were at some level not entirely unwelcome, or at least that she could appreciate at some level his diamond-in-the-rough qualities. Benecke/Müller/Zarncke confirms that *scham*, in its tertiary meaning, refers to the genitalia.

There's many a speaker of colloquial English who by this time, if they have not already, reflected upon considered the line, 'don't eat me,' and smirked. And here the problem of reading sexual innuendo comes full circle, as it were. What had on the face of it one meaning, now can be read sexually as referring to cunnilingus. The problem with that reading is almost certainly not the practice, since there is no reason to believe that oral sex went into hibernation between the Roman bath house mosaics and the movie, "*Deep Throat*." (1972).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> 139,8. See on this line also Martin Baisch, "man bôt ein badelachen dar:/ des nam er vil kleine war (167,21f.). Über Scham und Wahrnehmung in Wolframs *Parzival*," *Wahrnehmung im 'Parzival' Wolframs von Eschenbach. Actas do Colóquio Internacional 15 e 16 de Novembro de 2002*, ed. John Greenfield (Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2004), 105-32; here 125: "schame empfindet dagegen Jeschute (131,6); schlimmer noch: *ir scham begunde switzen*. (132,8)." (Jeschute, on the other hand, feels shame; worse yet: *ir scham begunde switzen*'). Elisabeth Lienert has alluded to the relationship between eating and sexual violence in "Zur Diskursivität der Gewalt in Wolframs *Parzival*," *Wolfram-Studien XVII*, ed. Wolfgang Haubrichs, Eckart Lutz and Klaus Ridder (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2002), 223-45; here 228: "Essen kann in Richtung Gewalt oder Versöhnung semantisiert sein: in beiden Fällen ist der Effekt Komik – und Verharmlosung." For the correlation between food and sexuality, see the contribution to this volume by Sarah Gordon.

<sup>29</sup> Albert Wimmer, *Anthology of Medieval German Literature*. Available online under: <http://www.nd.edu/~gantho/> (last accessed on March 31, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Explicit depictions of such sexual acts were not confined to the visual arts, of course. Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 562, writes: "References to fellatio and cunnilingus in comedy reflect no feelings of disgust or obloquy, except in the case of certain practitioners." See also the extensive bibliography by Wilfried Stroh, available online under: [http://www.klassphil.uni-muenchen.de/~stroh/erotik\\_bib.htm](http://www.klassphil.uni-muenchen.de/~stroh/erotik_bib.htm) (last accessed on March 31, 2008); see also the contributions to this volume by Peter Dinzelsbacher, Suzanne Kocher, and Gertrud Blaschitz.



The problem is, instead, that the language does not fit. There is no verifiable secondary meaning of 'to eat' in German which corresponds to the English colloquialism for cunnilingus. As a result, if there is sexual innuendo there, it is in the eye, or ear, of the beholder/listener. Even where the discovery of sexual innuendo is most tantalizing, we should be careful not to use the popularity of sexual innuendo as a license to see it everywhere, especially in the past.

The seriousness of the innuendo, or rather the potentially sexual situation which underlies it, should not be underestimated, however. A sexual inference is made, for example, subsequently by Jeschute's husband, Orilus, who accuses his wife of infidelity: *"'ôwê frowe, wie hân ich sus / mîn dienst gein iu gewendet! / . . . / ir habt ein ander âmîs'"* (133,6–10; *"'Alas, madam,' said proud Orilus, 'is it for this that I have addressed my service to you? . . . You have another lover!'"* 78).

To conclude: Reading sexual innuendo in medieval literature is a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, it requires acknowledgment of sexuality as a ubiquitous part of medieval literature and, with it, a willingness to accept that authors used sexual innuendo as easily and as often as any other theme or rhetorical device; not only to titillate, but also to enhance the performance aspect of literary presentations. On the other hand, a proper balance requires that we heed the Freudian dictum that "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."<sup>31</sup> Balance requires that we see medieval sexuality as being no different, in practice, if not in moral sanction, than our own; but it also requires that we do not uncritically seek a mirror to, or rather affirmation of, contemporary sexual culture or politics. Between the two extremes there remains much fertile soil to be plowed. As the present volume of essays documents, there is a rich, and often astonishingly frank, tradition of sexual discourse and description in medieval literature.<sup>32</sup>

Sexual innuendo was a vital element in the rhetorical arsenal of which medieval authors availed themselves in the engagement of their audiences. The question is not, therefore, one of demonstrating the constitutive role of sexuality, and sexual vocabulary, in medieval literature. Sensitivity to sexual innuendo can broaden an appreciation of the humanity, both base and lofty, which is celebrated in so much of medieval literature. Sensitivity to the potential for sexual innuendo is not, however, license to assert it everywhere and arbitrarily, without (con)textual foundation. The argument should address the issue of deliberate ambiguity and the bases for reading sexual innuendo in contexts which are not overtly sexual. While such limitations do not deny the potential for sexual innuendo, they do place a reasonable burden of proof on the reader.

<sup>31</sup> Although attributed to Freud, no documented source for the quote has been offered.

<sup>32</sup> Various aspects of more or less ambiguous sexual references are touched on in several of the articles, particularly those by Albrecht Classen ("Sexual Desire and Pornography"), Sarah Gordon, and Rasma Lazda-Cazers.

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## Singing Desire: Musical Innuendo in *Troubadour* and *Trouvère* Song

The *troubadours* and *trouvères* sang of love in many different genres, using courtly, sacred, and frankly sexual registers of language in ways that have invited study and explication for over 800 years. The humor attendant upon the physical aspects of *fin'amor* was part of the original poet-composers' playful competition of words and wits, and, as Albrecht Classen has noted in his introduction to this volume, medieval writers "had no problem with playful allusions to sexuality." Another dimension of the game, music and its interaction with text, offers fruitful material for study.

Although only about one-third of all *troubadour* and *trouvère* songs (taken together) survive with musical notation,<sup>1</sup> evidence suggests that the *troubadours* and *trouvères* considered their musical settings equal in importance to their texts.<sup>2</sup> The vast amount of scholarly literature addressing the poems continues to unfold new interpretations; the musical settings, however, have proven somewhat less accessible to analysis. After considering the problem of musical expression in

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<sup>1</sup> John Haines, *Eight Centuries of Troubadours and Trouvères: The Changing Identity of Medieval Music* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20, states that of some 2,500 poems in Old Occitan, "a mere 253 are transmitted with music, with 322 different musical readings," while for the approximately 2,500 *trouvère* poems there exists "a total of about 2,500 melodies with nearly 5,000 readings." Peter Burkholder, *A History of Western Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 78, notes, "About 2,600 troubadour poems survive, a tenth with melodies; by contrast, two-thirds of the 2,100 extant *trouvère* poems have music." Elizabeth Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 49, counts 246 *troubadour* poems with melodies, 195 of which "have only one version of a melody extant."

<sup>2</sup> Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours*, 78, drawing on treatises of rhetoric and music theory as well as the texts of the poems themselves, concludes that "the troubadours imagined their texts and melodies as cohesive parts of a whole, and that they understood the peculiar capacity of each to convey what they intended." Furthermore, Aubrey, 77, notes that for the Parisian music theorist, Johannes de Grocheio (ca. 1300), a song "is not actuated, or realized, until it is sung aloud."

strophic form and the opportunities for musical innuendo in performance, this essay examines two contrasting works, “Bele Ysabiau” by the *trouvère* Audefroie le Bâtard (fl. 1190–1230), and “Lo ferm voler” by the *troubadour* Arnaut Daniel (fl. 1180–1200), showing how their musical settings act as equal partners to text and convey innuendo through musical structure, foreground gestures, and performance possibilities.

The greatest challenge to apprehending the specific role of music vis à vis text in a particular song is the melodies’ strophic form, wherein one musical setting is repeated for each of the many stanzas of the text. The most obvious type of textual expression in music, “text painting” or “word-painting,”<sup>3</sup> occurs rarely in these strophic songs, and even if a specific musical gesture seems to express an individual phrase or word especially well, such expression is usually limited to a particular stanza of the text.

Most musicologists who have addressed the questions of music and text in strophic form have concluded that the form is aesthetically lacking in opportunities for direct expression of specific words.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Aubrey, however, has articulated a promising theory of strophic form in the *troubadour* repertoire: the progression of musical gestures and ideas in the strophe, heard multiple times as the poem moves once through its stanzas, presents an experiential tracing and retracing of the same events or ideas voiced in the text as a whole.<sup>5</sup> The short musical strophe achieves this microcosmic relationship to the cycle of the longer lyric text through structural design as well as through various melodic gestures of tonal direction or ambiguity, closure, embellishment, tension, assertion, and the like.

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Carter, “Word Painting,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (New York: Grove Dictionaries, 2001), vol. 27: 563, gives this definition: “The use of musical gesture(s) in a work with an actual or implied text to reflect, often pictorially, the literal or figurative meaning of a word or phrase. A common example is a falling line for ‘descendit de caelis’ (‘He came down from heaven’).”

<sup>4</sup> For discussion of the “strophic form problem,” see Hans Tischler, “Does Trouvère Melody Express Poetic Meanings?” *Orbis musicae* 10 (1990): 87–97; Edward A. Lippman, “Reflections on the Aesthetics of Strophic Song: An Addendum to *Das deutsche Lied*,” *The Philosophy and Aesthetics of Music* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 65–77; Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1974), 166; and Leo Treitler, “The Troubadours Singing Their Poems,” *The Union of Words and Music in Medieval Poetry*, ed. Rebecca A. Baltzer, Thomas Cable and James I. Wimsatt (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1991), 15–48. These treatments offer only an elaborated echo of the conclusion drawn by the eighteenth-century music critic, James Beattie, “Essay on Poetry and Music as They Affect the Mind,” excerpted in Edward A. Lippman, ed., *Musical Aesthetics: A Historical Reader*, Vol. 1, *From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1986), 215–42: “the general tenor of the music should accord with the general nature of the sentiments” expressed in the poem.

<sup>5</sup> Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours*, 89.

Performance, too, is crucial in these songs and can invest their strophic form with variation from stanza to stanza. Singing a song embodies language in an immediate, physical reality more strongly than merely reading or reciting a text can do, and a skilled singer has many means of emphasizing textual nuance. More important, as Stephen G. Nichols notes, “at the moment of performance, the singing voice merged music and poetry into a song that was also a confession, with all the ambiguity and deception that that term implies.”<sup>6</sup> And, Siegfried Christoph has argued in his contribution to this volume that “the very idea of the ‘nod’ implicit in innuendo establishes a dynamic relationship between performer and audience.”<sup>7</sup>

The two songs under examination here—“Bele Ysabiauz” (Beautiful Isabelle), an Old-French song, and “Lo ferm voler” (The Firm Desire), an Occitan lyric—provide examples in which the poet-composers clearly play with the contrast between the high-minded conventions of *fin’amor* and a commonly understood subtext of sexual meanings. In these strophic songs music proves itself the equal of text, conveying multiple meanings through structural design and foreground gestures,<sup>8</sup> providing direct, sonic experience of what the texts describe and relate, and often affording opportunity for a performative “nod, nudge, or wink” to the audience.<sup>9</sup>

“Bele Ysabiauz” by the *trouvère* Audefroï le Bâtard, is a *chanson de toile* (song of cloth), a narrative genre from northern France thought to have functioned originally as an accompaniment to women’s needlework.<sup>10</sup> Typical of the genre, the text of “Bele Ysabiauz” tells a story involving love. (Appendix A provides the

<sup>6</sup> Stephen G. Nichols, “Voice and Body in the Early Troubadours: Theoretical Approaches to Medieval Song,” *The Medieval Lyric: Commentary Volume*, ed. Howell Chickering and Margaret Switten (South Hadley, MA: The Medieval Lyric, 1988), 28–42; here, 29.

<sup>7</sup> See Siegfried Christoph’s essay, “The Limits of Reading Innuendo in Medieval Literature,” in this volume for a discussion of erotic, if not sexual, innuendos in medieval literature.

<sup>8</sup> I have adapted these terms from Heinrich Schenker’s analytical concept of hierarchical layers in the structure of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music. “Structural movement” is related to Schenker’s *Ursatz* (fundamental structure), background layer, or large-scale linear movement, while “foreground” is borrowed from Schenker’s *Vordergrund*, the layer representing the detailed surface of a piece in such aspects as motivic repetition and rhythmic patterns. See Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, vol. 3, *New Musical Theories and Fantasies*, trans. and ed. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, Inc., 1979), originally published as *Der freie Satz*, vol. 3, *Neue musikalische Theorien und Phantasien* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1935); 2nd ed., rev. and ed. Oswald Jonas (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1956).

<sup>9</sup> Christoph points out that the word innuendo derives from the Latin *innuere*, “nod to, signify.”

<sup>10</sup> Michelle Zink, *Belle: Essai sur les chansons de toile suivi d’une édition et d’une traduction* (Paris: Champion, 1978), 16. “Belle Ysabiauz” survives with two closely related musical settings: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 12615 [ms. T] and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 844 [ms. M]. The setting presented in this study is that of ms. M, in *trouvère* manuscripts T and M.

full text and translation.) The narrative concerns Gerard and Ysabiauz, a young couple who encounter obstacles to their strong, honorable, and mutual love.

Like many of the *chansons de toile*, “Bele Ysabiauz” features, at the end of each stanza, a recurring one-line refrain: *Et joie atent Gerars* (And Gerard waited for his bliss). This phrase is laden with innuendo, for the word *joie* can mean bliss, pleasure, delight, or sexual pleasure.<sup>11</sup> This line is sung to the same musical phrase at the close of every stanza, with a slight change of wording on its final occurrence: *Or a joie Gerars* (Now Gerard had his bliss). The thirteen stanzas of the text consist of a third-person narrative containing several quotations of dialogue between Gerard and Ysabiauz, shown in Table 1 grouped into six sections based on their function and the use of third-person narration versus spoken dialogue.

**Table 1: Sections of Text Corresponding to Lines of Music in “Bele Ysabiauz”**

TEXT	MUSIC
<b>Section I: Stanzas 1–2–3</b> Exposition/Action NARRATION G waited for bliss	<b>Line 1</b>
<b>Section II: Stanzas 4–5</b> Dialogue Y SPEAKS G waited for his bliss	<b>Line 2</b>
<b>Section III: stanzas 6–7</b> Dialogue G SPEAKS G waited for his bliss	<b>Line 3</b>
<b>Section IV: Stanzas 8–9</b> Decision/Action	<b>Line 4</b>

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<sup>11</sup> Alan Hindley, Frederick W. Langley, and Brian J. Levy, *Old French–English Dictionary* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 377. See the study on this topic by Siegfried Christoph, “The Language and Culture of Joy,” *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, forthcoming).

## NARRATION

G waited for his bliss

**Section V: Stanzas 10–11****Line 5**

Action/Dialogue/Action

NARR/G SPEAKS/NARR

G waited for his bliss

**Section VI: Stanzas 12–13****Line 6**

Action/Resolution

NARRATION

Now G had his bliss

After Ysabiau's parents marry her off to a squire against her will (Stanza 2), Gerard finds a way to meet her privately (Stanza 3). In their dialogue (Stanzas 4 through 7) the lovers express their sorrow, but Ysabiau, bound to her conventional duty, sends Gerard on his way. Gerard, having taken the cross, begins preparations to go on a crusade (Stanza 8), but meets with Ysabiau one last time in her garden (Stanzas 9 and 10). The point of highest tension occurs in stanza 11, when Gerard tells Ysabiau that he is leaving. There, in the beautiful garden *pour la verdour* (with everything in bloom)—a typical *locus amoenus*—the lovers suddenly fall into an ardent embrace:

"Dame, pour Deu," fait Gerars sanz faintise,

"D'outre mer ai pour vous la voie emprise."

La dame l'ot, mieus vousist estre ocise.

Si s'entrebaissent par douçour

Qu'andui cheïrent en l'erbour.

*Et joie atent Gerars.*

["My lady, for God's sake," said Gerard earnestly,

"I have decided, because of you, to go across the sea."

At those words, the lady would have rather been killed.

The two locked together in such an ardent embrace

that they both fell to the ground.

And Gerard waited for his bliss.]

Audefrois adeptly resolves the crisis in the remaining two stanzas of the text. Stanza 12 describes the arrival of the husband, who, thinking his lady is dead, loses his strength and dies; Stanza 13 narrates the conclusion of the story:

De pasmoisons lievent par tel devise

Qu'il firent faire au mort tout son servise.

Li deus remaint. Gerars par sainte eglise

A fait de sa dame s'oissour.

Ce tesmoignent li ancissour.  
*Or a joie Gerars.*

[The lovers rose from their swoon and saw to it  
 that the dead man was properly buried.  
 Their grieving came to an end. With holy blessing  
 Gerard took his lady to wife.  
 That is the story that has come down to us.  
*Now Gerard had his bliss.*]<sup>12</sup>

Finally, “Gerard had his bliss;” the change in wording in the last occurrence of the refrain line underscores the (honorable) fulfillment of Gerard’s and Ysabiau’s desire and provides a final “wink” of innuendo that discharges, with humor, the accumulated tension of the narrative.<sup>13</sup>

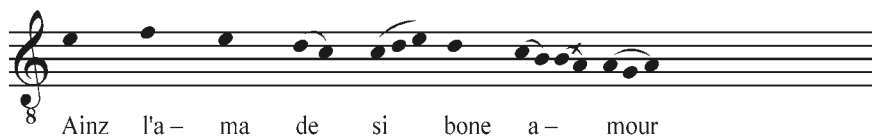
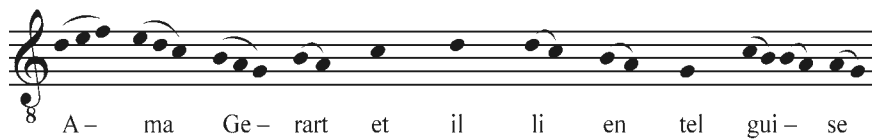
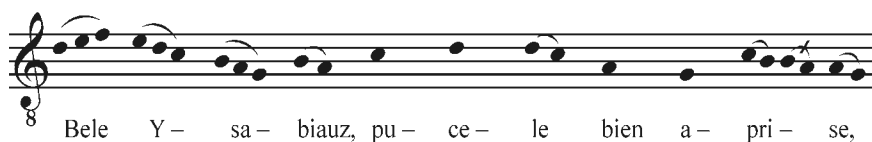
An examination of music-text interaction in the song demonstrates that the strophic musical setting supports and broadens the innuendo of the text and contributes significantly to the work as a whole. First and most obviously, text and music maintain a direct formal relationship in the lengths of the individual lines when compared to the progression of the entire plot of the narrative. Audefrois’s musical setting (Example 1) consists of only six lines of music, which correspond to the six sections of the text set out in Table 1.

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<sup>12</sup> Rosenberg, Switten, and Le Vot, *Songs of the Troubadours and Trouvères*, 288.

<sup>13</sup> **Editor:** This theme was picked up again, whether in response to the medieval model or not, by nineteenth- and twentieth-century German writers, such as Heinrich von Kleist and Wilhelm Schäfer; see Albrecht Classen, “Der Tristan-Stoff im 20. Jahrhundert. Moderne Novellistik und mittelalterliche Rezeptionsformen: Wilhelm Schäfers ‘Anckemanns Tristan’,” *Carleton Germanic Papers* 24 (1996): 109–26.

## Example 1. Audefroï le Bâtard, "Bele Ysabiauz, pucele bien aprise" (R 1616)





Echoing the quickened pace of the narrative at Sections IV and V (stanzas 8 through 11 as outlined in Table 1), lines 4 and 5 of each stanza, at eight syllables each, are shorter than the eleven syllables of lines 1 through 3. And line 6, the short refrain line, occupies a mere six syllables and thus communicates the rapid resolution of the plot in Section VI (stanzas 12 and 13).

The melody for the refrain, however, contains five neumes (settings of syllables with two to five pitches), freighting the musical line with an abundance of ornament. In performance, a singer could emphasize the structure of the poem by singing the line's eighteen articulations quickly, allowing the short refrain to reflect the plot's swift dénouement. A better choice, however, could prolong the sixth line with a *ritardando*, lingering on the neumes and emphasizing both the length of Gerard's wait (Sections I–V of the text) and his final attainment of *joie*. This nuance is further emphasized in the recorded performance by the group Estampie: Münchner Ensemble für frühe Musik, which features two vocalists, Sigrid Hausen and Michael Popp singing the words of Ysabiau and Gerard. On every occurrence of the refrain, the two singers, male and female, join in a duet, drawing out the neumes in a manner charged with broad innuendo.<sup>14</sup>

While the final line of music carries the largest proportion of neumes in any one line, lines 1 through 5 also contain a fair number. A tally of pitches and syllables reveals a rather high neumatic density; 61.8% of the syllables are set to more than one articulated pitch.<sup>15</sup> Although lengthy melismas in the liturgy of the medieval church sometimes incorporated as many as fifty or sixty pitches on a single syllable and were associated with a state of spiritual transcendence and a wordless expression of blissful experience of divine paradise,<sup>16</sup> none of the neumes in "Bele Ysabiau" exceeds even five pitches. I suggest, nonetheless, that the cumulative effect of the many short neumes in conjunction with the humorous text of "Bele Ysabiau" led listeners' associations to a realm of imagined earthly pleasure.

In sum, Audefrois, in "Bele Ysabiau" gives us a carefully crafted *chanson de toile* in which music acts as an equal partner to text, its strophic form tracing in

<sup>14</sup> "A Chantar": *Lieder der Frauen-Minne im Mittelalter*, Estampie: Münchner Ensemble für frühe Musik, compact disc, Christophorus, CHR 74583, © and © 1990.

<sup>15</sup> Twenty-one syllables are set with one note per syllable, while thirty-four are set with more than one articulated pitch (fourteen syllables are set to two pitches, twelve to three, seven to four, and one to five).

<sup>16</sup> Richard L. Crocker, "Melisma," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (last accessed on March 31, 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>, defines a melisma as "a group of more than five or six notes sung to a single syllable." For a recent article tracing the liturgical tradition of melismas in the sequence genre, see Lori Kruckenberg, "Neumatizing the Sequence: Special Performances of Sequences in the Central Middle Ages," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59, 2 (2006): 243–318. Kruckenberg, 266–77, notes that many liturgical commentators of the Middle Ages viewed the purpose of Christians engaging in wordless (melismatic) song "as mankind's aspiration to emit the mysterious, hermetic, musical language of the angels."

miniature the overall movement of the plot. The multiplicity of neumes in the foreground details of the setting as a whole contributes to the experience of the topos of the song—the realm of fantasy and the erotic imagination. Furthermore, the changed wording of the last appearance of the refrain line coupled with its densely neumatic setting (four words set to eighteen articulated pitches) functions to resolve the narrative's tension—what Christoph suggests is “the essence of sexual innuendo”—by evoking the “shared relief and recognition of laughter.”<sup>17</sup>

In sharp contrast to the narrative of “Bele Ysabiauz,” Arnaut Daniel's canso “Lo ferm voler” (Example 2),<sup>18</sup> a work admired and imitated by a long line of poets beginning with Dante and Petrarch, presents a lyric, first-person treatment of erotic desire. Indeed, as Charles Jernigan suggests, the directness of expression in the poem may have been what landed Arnaut among the lustful in Dante's *Purgatorio*.<sup>19</sup> The almost relentlessly syllabic musical setting conveys a more direct tone than that of the “frilly,” decorated music of “Bele Ysabiauz,”<sup>20</sup> and bears some resemblance to the syllabic recitation used in the medieval church for chanting important scriptural texts, where the apprehension of sacred words was paramount and music acted as an ancillary. In “Lo ferm voler,” however, Arnaut's music plays a role equal to that of the text, manifesting in sound the text's structure, metaphors, and innuendo through its carefully composed background structure and foreground gestures.

<sup>17</sup> Christoph, in the present volume.

<sup>18</sup> The music for *Lo ferm voler* survives only in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, R 71 superiore.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Jernigan, “The Song of the Nail and Uncle: Arnaut Daniel's Sestina ‘Lo ferm voler q'el cor m'intra,’” *Studies in Philology* 71, 2 (April 1974): 127–51; here 150–51. Dante accords the *troubadour* high honor by casting Arnaut's speech in Canto XXVI (ll. 139–47) of the *Purgatorio* in Old Occitan, the only use of a vernacular language other than Italian in the *Commedia*: “*Tan m'abellis vostre cortez deman, / qu'ieu no me puesc ni voill a vos cobrire. / Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan; / consiros vei la passada folor, / e vei jausen lo joi qu'esper, denan. / Ara vos prec, per aquella valor / que vos guida al som de l'escalina, / sovenha vos a temps de ma dolor!*” (So does your courteous request please me — / I neither could nor would conceal myself / from you. I am Arnaut, who, going, weep / and sing; with grief, I see my former folly; / with joy, I see the hoped-for day draw near. / Now, by the Power that conducts you to / the summit of the stairway, I pray you: / remember, at time opportune, my pain!) Text and translation from *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, vol. 2, *Purgatorio*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 246–47.

<sup>20</sup> The neumatic density of “Lo ferm voler” is a mere 12.7%; of its sixty-three syllables, fifty-five are set to only one pitch, seven to two, and only one to three pitches.

**Example 2. Arnaut Daniel, "Lo ferm voler" (PC 29.14)**

The musical score is written on six staves, each beginning with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are in Occitan. The notation includes various note values (minims, crotchets, quavers) and rests. Some notes are beamed together, and there are occasional accidentals (sharps and flats). The lyrics are as follows:

Lo ferm vo – ler q'el cor m'in – tra

no'm pot ies becs es – cois – sen – dre ni on – gla

de lau – sen – gier, qui pert per mal dir s'ar – ma;

e car non l'aus batr' ab ram ni ab ver – ga,

si – vals a frau, lai on non au – rai on – cle,

iau – zi – rai ioi, en ver – gier o dinz cam – bra.

“Lo ferm voler” is the first of its kind, a poetic form invented by Arnaut and only later given the name *sestina*.<sup>21</sup> The form is related to *coblas capcaudadas* (stanzas head-to-tail), an Occitan stanzaic pattern where the last rhyme of each stanza is used as the first rhyme of the next.<sup>22</sup> In his *sestina*, Arnaut sets stricter limits on the poetic form by repeating entire words at the ends of lines rather than mere end-rhymes. Furthermore, he uses a complicated scheme (Table 2) of repetition for his chosen end-words, “known in medieval rhetoric as *retrogradatio cruciata*,” where the order—1 2 3 4 5 6—of end-words of each stanza is re-ordered—6 1 5 2 4 3—in the next, forming a kind of “braid.”<sup>23</sup>

**Table 2: End-Word Repetition in “Lo ferm voler”**

Stanza 1	Stanza 2	Stanza 3	Stanza 4	Stanza 5	Stanza 6
intra 1	cambra 6	arma	oncle	verga	ongla
onlga 2	intra 1	cambra	arma	oncle	verga
arma 3	oncle 5	verga	ongla	intra	cambra
verga 4	ongla 2	intra	cambra	arma	oncle
oncle 5	verga 4	ongla	intra	cambra	arma
cambra 6	arma 3	oncle	verga	ongla	intra

These formal constraints provide a fitting test of skill for Arnaut, who was known for creating challenges for himself and his audience in the arduous, obscure style of *trobar clus*.<sup>24</sup> The musical setting of “Lo ferm voler”—one of only two of his

<sup>21</sup> See F. J. A Davidson, “The Origin of the Sestina,” *Modern Language Notes* 25, 1 (1910): 18–20. Among currently active poets inspired by the sestina form are the contributors to the e-list forum, “Sestina,” an off-branch of the website “The Sestina Page,” <http://www.geocities.com/suzstina/sestina.htm> (last accessed on March 31, 2008), a site operative since 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the last rhyme-word of the last stanza matches the first rhyme-word of the first, placing the poem also in the category of *coblas redondas*, another type of Occitan stanzaic pattern.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Spanos, “The Sestina: An Exploration of the Dynamics of Poetic Structure,” *Speculum* 53, 3 (July 1978): 545–57; here, 546.

<sup>24</sup> The tornada of one of Arnaut’s songs, “En cest sonet coind’e leri” (PC 29.10), quoted in his *vida*, provides evidence for Arnaut’s self-conscious cultivation of the *trobar clus*: *Ieu sui Arnautz, q’amas l’aura, / e chatz la lebre ab lo bou, / e nadi contra suberna*. (I am Arnaut, who hoards the wind, / And chases the rabbit (on an ox’s back), / And swims against the swelling tide.) Text and translation (with emendation in the second line) from James J. Wilhelm, ed. and trans., *The Poetry of Arnaut Daniel* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981), 42. Arnaut’s *vida* is preserved in Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, lat. 5232 [Ms A]. Dante’s lines in Canto XXVI of the *Purgatorio* echo the words and syntax of this poetic manifesto.

nineteen poems that survive with musical notation—also shows evidence of Arnaut's delight in handling difficult challenges.<sup>25</sup>

In the text of "Lo ferm voler" (Appendix B) each of the six rhyme words—*intra*, *ongla*, *arma*, *verga*, *oncle*, and *cambra*—carries multiple meanings. As Jernigan points out, each word has at least one sexual connotation, a fact Arnaut played upon to great effect, as witnessed in the amount of scholarly commentary generated over the years.<sup>26</sup> The musical setting, however, is the primary concern of the present study, particularly the way the music's structure and gestures realize the text and support and contribute to its innuendo.

Structurally, the music mirrors the pattern of the six end-words of the sestina's lines in two ways (Example 3). First, six different pitches (C, G, F, A, E, B) function as beginning and ending pitches of the six lines of music, and the final pitch (C) is used as the first pitch of each new repetition of the melody, an echo of the text's *coblas capcaudadas*

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<sup>25</sup> Wilhelm, *The Poetry of Arnaut Daniel*, 117, notes that editors differ on the attribution of the nineteenth song "Entre.l taur e.l doble signe" (PC 411.3) (Between the bull and the double sign), but supports it as Arnaut's. "En cest sonet coind'e leri" (PC 29.10) (In this little song, pretty, and joyful) does not survive with a musical setting, although Gerard Zuchetto, *Chante les troubadours XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, compact disc, Gallo, CD-529, © and © 1988 VDE-GALLO, has recorded it to a new melody.

<sup>26</sup> See Jernigan, "The Song of the Nail and Uncle," 130–38, for a summary of eleven scholarly opinions. Jernigan, 133–34, considers the Arnaut's use of the word *arma* untranslatable, arguing that in addition to its "noble meaning," *soul*, Arnaut also implies the phallic connotation of *arma*, the singular of *armas* (weapons).

**Example 3. Six pitches (C, G, F, A, E, B) beginning and ending lines in Arnaut Daniel, "Lo ferm voler"**

8 Lo ferm vo – ler q'el cor m'in – tra

8 no-m pot ies becs es – cois – sen – dre ni on – gla

8 de lau – sen – gier, qui pert per mal dir s'ar – ma;

8 e car non l'aus batr' ab ram ni ab ver – ga,

8 si – vals a frau, lai on non au – rai on – cle,

8 iau – zi – rai ioi, en ver – gier o dinz cam – bra.

Margaret Switten has noted a subset of these six pitches, the three pitches ending the six lines of the melody (G, F, and C), as a unique pattern in *troubadour* song: "The sequence of cadences is unlike any other *troubadour* melody; they follow each other 2 by 2, thus *g* for lines 1 and 2, *f* for lines 3 and 4, *c* for lines 5 and 6."<sup>27</sup> Close examination of the setting reveals patterns of repeated notes that feature the same three pitches (G, F, and C) that end the paired lines.<sup>28</sup> These patterns of assertive repetition, marked in Example 4, feature eight instances of immediate pitch repetition.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Margaret Switten, "De la Sextine: amour et musique chez Arnaut Daniel," *Mélanges de langue et de littérature occitanes en hommage à Pierre Bec*, 549–65 (Poitiers: Université de Poitiers C.E.S.C.M., 1991), quoted and trans. in Samuel N. Rosenberg, Margaret Switten, and Gerard Le Vot, *Songs of the Troubadours and Trouvères: An Anthology of Poems and Melodies* (New York: Garland, 1998), 89.

<sup>28</sup> Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours*, 203, notes that another significant pattern of repetition, the predominance of cadences "articulated by a descending two- or three-note figure on the penultimate stressed syllable" create a "litany" of "feminine rhyme words."

<sup>29</sup> These patterns include one occurrence of repetition of the pitch F, two of the pitch C, four of G, and one of D. (In the third of the repetitions on G, the pitch G is decorated by its upper neighbor, the pitch A). Each repeated pitch is followed by melodic movement of an ascending or descending step or skip (four ascents and four descents), providing balance within the basic pattern and voicing a second group of six pitches, the natural hexachord (C, D, E, F, G, A), part of the hexachord system traditionally attributed, along with the "Guidonian Hand" to the eleventh-century music theorist Guido of Arezzo. See Hucbald, *Guido and John on Music: Three Medieval Treatises*, ed. Claude V. Palisca, trans. Warren Babb (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 49.

**Example 4. Arnaut Daniel, "Lo ferm voler": repeated pitch patterns voicing the natural hexachord (C, D, E, F, G, A)**

The musical score consists of six staves of music in a single system, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in a style that emphasizes the natural hexachord (C, D, E, F, G, A). The lyrics are in Occitan. The score is divided into sections by numbered boxes (1-8) indicating repeated pitch patterns.

Staff 1: **8** Lo ferm **1** vo – ler q'el cor m'in – tra

Staff 2: **2** no-m pot ies becs es – cois – sen – dre **3** ni on – gla

Staff 3: **8** de lau – sen – gier, qui pert per mal dir s'ar – ma;

Staff 4: **8** e car non **4** l'aus batr' ab ram ni **5** ab ver – ga,

Staff 5: **8** si – vals a **6** frau, lai on non au – rai on – cle,

Staff 6: **8** iau – zi – rai ioi, en ver – gier o dinz **7** cam – bra. **8**



The musical assertions marked in Example 4 project the text's central metaphor of determination, the *ferm voler* of "a lover so set on obtaining the object of his love that nothing will deter him."<sup>30</sup> These gestures of perseverance involve six different pitches, each featuring the immediate repetition of one pitch, followed by an ascent or descent of a step or a skip. The patterns occur within individual lines of the musical setting, and also between lines 2 and 3 and lines 6 and 1, suggesting conscious design of the music at the same level of complexity as the text and an expression of the poetic form in the structure of the music.<sup>31</sup>

Another repeated metaphor in the text, the striking image employing the rhyme-word *ongla* (fingernail, claw, or talon), occurs three times (in stanzas 3, 4, and 5), stating the persona's wish to be as near to the lady as finger or flesh is to fingernail. In the sixth stanza Arnaut creates a new verb, *s'enongla* (enfingernailed), which, Jernigan stresses, "at once suggests sexual penetration": *C'aissi s'enpren e s'enongla / mos cors en lei cum l'escorss' en la verga* (My body is just as rooted and enfingernailed / in her as the bark on the rod).<sup>32</sup>

The musical gestures, perhaps perceived but not cognitively understood by an audience,<sup>33</sup> nevertheless function within the melody as "nods, winks, or nudges" to the audience and emphasize the text's metaphors of contact between *finger* and *nail*, or *bark* and *rod*. One of these, the use of upper and lower melodic neighbor patterns, occurs twelve times in the melody (Example 5).

<sup>30</sup> Jernigan, "The Song of the Nail and Uncle," 135.

<sup>31</sup> For discussion of medieval discourses on the numerical significance of the number 6, see Spanos, "The Sestina: An Exploration," 548–51; Roger Dragonetti, "The Double Play of Arnaut Daniel's Sestina and Dante's Divina Commedia," *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, special issue, *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977): 227–52; and Marilyn Krysl, "Sacred and Profane: The Sestina as Rite," *The American Poetry Review* 33, 2 (Mar/Apr 2004): 7–12.

<sup>32</sup> Jernigan, "The Song of the Nail and Uncle," 132–33. The translation is from Jernigan, 144.

<sup>33</sup> Derek B. Scott, "Mimesis, Gesture, and Parody in Musical Word-Setting," *Words and Music*, ed. John Williamson. Liverpool Music Symposium, 3 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), 10–27; here 21, asserts, "music acts upon the mind through perception rather than cognition."

Example 5. Upper and lower neighbor gestures in Arnaut Daniel,  
*"Lo ferm voler"*

8 Lo ferm vo – ler q'el cor m'in – tra

8 no-m pot ies becs es – cois – sen – dre ni on – gla

8 de lau – sen – gier, qui pert per mal dir s'ar – ma;

8 e car non l'aus batr' ab ram ni ab ver – ga,

8 si – vals a frau, lai on non au – rai on – cle,

8 iau – zi – rai ioi, en ver – gier o dinz cam – bra.

The innuendo of this melodic gesture can easily be brought out in performance through vocal inflection, facial expression (a lifted eyebrow?), or bodily movement.

Two particularly contrasting recorded performances, by Peter Becker and Gerard Zuchetto, illustrate different approaches to the song. Becker's unaccompanied performance is lyrical, while still conveying some humorous innuendo if one knows to listen for it.<sup>34</sup> Zuchetto's, on the other hand, features instrumental accompaniment (the citole, a plucked string instrument) in stanzas 1 through 5,<sup>35</sup> and a marked percussion accompaniment<sup>36</sup> in stanza 6, where Zuchetto emphatically speaks rather than sings most of the words.<sup>37</sup> Hearing his full, dynamic voice over the persistent drum, one can imagine a twelfth-century Elvis gyrating to illustrate the implications of the text.

Apart from performance decisions, a final feature of the musical structure, melodic contour, illustrates the progression outlined in the poem and presents further evidence for Arnaut's conscious design of the song. The text moves from the initial statement of desire and fear of obstacles (Stanzas 1 and 2), through increasingly stronger assertions of desire (Stanzas 3, 4, and 5) to what Jernigan terms a "nearly

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Becker, *Monastic Song, Troubadour Song, German Song*, compact disc accompanying *Anthology 1 of The Medieval Lyric: A Project Supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and Mount Holyoke College*, Margaret Switten, dir. and Robert Eisenstein, prod. coord. ©2001 Mount Holyoke College, performs the song twice on the recording, once unaccompanied (track 17), and again, with lute accompaniment (track 18). Compare also the unaccompanied performance by Benjamin Bagby, *Dante and the Troubadours*, Sequentia: Ensemble for Medieval Music, Barbara Thornton and Benjamin Bagby, dirs., compact disc, Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 05472-77227-2, © and © 1995 BMG Music.

<sup>35</sup> Gerard Zuchetto, *Chante les troubadours XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, compact disc, Gallo, CD-529, © and © 1988 VDE-GALLO. The citole accompaniment on this recording is performed by Patrice Brient.

<sup>36</sup> Robert S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), develops the concept of "markedness" for use in musical analysis. Hatten bases his analytical concept on the work of the linguist, Edwin L. Battistella, *Markedness: The Evaluative Superstructure of Language* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990). The percussionist on the Zuchetto recording is Jacques Khoudir.

<sup>37</sup> Zuchetto, *Chante les troubadours*. Richard Rastell, in a review of a different recording, *Trobar e cantar*, by Gérard Zuchetto, *Early Music* 20, 4 (November 1992): 683-85, notes that although Zuchetto's voice is "a strong one well suited to performance in a spacious auditorium," it does not "have enough flexibility to project the necessary range of expression." Hence, in the later, live recording, according to Rastell, Zuchetto "resorts to slightly gimmicky methods" such as "tempo changes that may do the trick in live performance but do not bear repetition." Rastell also comments that "even if some of the accompaniments were exciting 'live,' the more rock-like and space-age effects really do not do long-term service to these songs." Zuchetto's performing style is influenced by the "Arabic style," a trend popular in modern recordings of medieval music as discussed in John Haines, "The Arabic Style of Performing Medieval Music," *Early Music* 29, 3 (August 2001): 369-80.

perfect combination of the courtly and sexual levels," in stanza 6, the climax of the poem.<sup>38</sup>

C'aissi s'enpren e s'enongla  
mos cors en lei cum l'escors'en la verga;  
q'ill m'es de ioi tors e palaitz e cambra,  
e non am tant fraire, paren ni oncle:  
q'en paradis n'aura doble ioi m'arma,  
si ia nuills hom per ben amar lai intra.

[My body is just as rooted and enfinger-nailed  
in her as the bark on the rod (branch);  
for she is my tower, palace and chamber of joy,  
and I do not love brother, parent, nor uncle so much;  
and my *arma* will have double joy of her in paradise,  
if ever a man enters there for loving well.]<sup>39</sup>

The melodic contours traced by the three pairs of lines (ending on the three pitches G, F, and C) reflect the movement of the persona's thoughts and feelings through the three pairs of stanzas. Taking cues from Sarah Fuller's work on several polyphonic versus notated in twelfth-century Aquitanian manuscripts in what at first appear to be successive lines of monophony<sup>40</sup> and from Margaret Switten's assertion that "the monastery school of Saint Martial provided an education for the nobles of the region and, more than likely, for some of their poets,"<sup>41</sup> I have charted on a common axis the successive pitches of each set of two consecutive musical lines ending on the same pitch. The resulting graphs reveal a musical "narrative" that sketches the progression of the persona's desire.

<sup>38</sup> Jernigan, "The Song of the Nail and Uncle," 144.

<sup>39</sup> The translation here is from Jernigan, 144.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah Fuller, "Hidden Polyphony, A Reappraisal," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24, 2 (Summer 1971): 169–92, details a long "undercover" existence of polyphony, "hidden" by the manner in which it is notated. The successive notation of two parts appears at first glance to be continuous, successive lines of monophony, but has been confirmed as polyphony by stylistic considerations as well as by contemporary concordances in score notation. The two main manuscripts carrying this hidden polyphony are both Aquitanian, and both are from the Abbey of Saint Martial, c. 1100. The principal type of composition notated in this unusual way is the Aquitanian *versus*, a Latin-texted, rhyming, strophic genre. Although there is no direct evidence that Arnaut Daniel (fl 1180–1200) would have known of this tradition, its existence in manuscripts from this region at this time is intriguing.

<sup>41</sup> Margaret Switten, "Saint Martial of Limoges," *The Medieval Lyric: Anthology I, Monastic Song, Troubadour song, German Song, Trouvère Song* (Mount Holyoke College, 1988), 1–3; here, 1. Switten's recent article, "Versus and Troubadours around 1100: A Comparative Study of Refrain Technique in the 'New Song,'" *Plain-song and Medieval Music* 16, 2 (October 2007): 91–143; here, 95, explores the use of refrains in both the Aquitanian *versus* and *troubadour* song and suggests that members of both groups, courtly and clerical, were present in the audience for *troubadour* performances at the court of Poitiers, "an important intellectual melting pot."

Each pair of lines begins in contrary motion, but only lines 1 and 2 (Figure 1) maintain much distance throughout, reflecting the threats to the poet's desire mentioned in stanzas 1 and 2, the *lausengier* (slanderer) and the persona's *paor* (fear) of not realizing his desire.

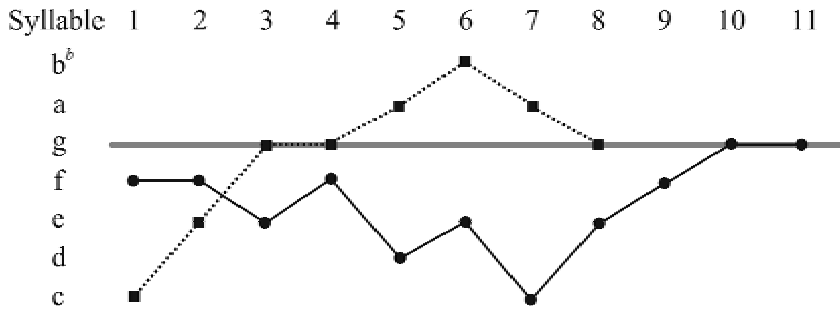


Figure 1. Arnaut Daniel, "Lo ferm voler," melodic contour, paired lines 1 (■····■) and 2 (●—●)

Lines 3 and 4—loosely analogous to stanzas 3 and 4 of the poem in light of Aubrey's theory of text-music relationship in strophic song—initially move in opposite directions, a contour that suggests obstacles yet to be overcome (Figure 2). As the text of these two stanzas unfolds, the poet wishes for

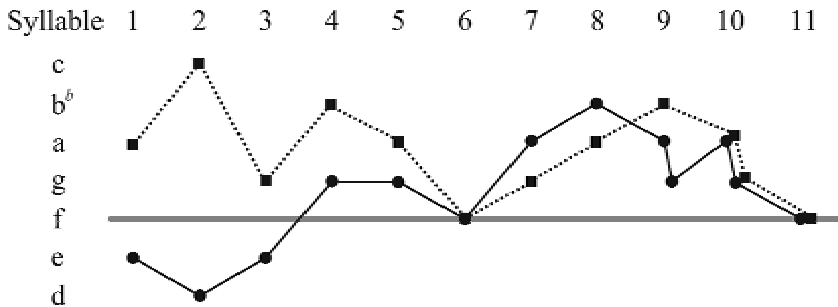


Figure 2. Arnaut Daniel, "Lo ferm voler," melodic contour, paired lines 3 (■····■) and 4 (●—●)

fulfillment of his desire in the face of obstacles: *Del cors li fos, non de l'arma, . . . / Que plus mi nafra. l cor que colps de verga / car lo sieus sers lai on ill es non intra* (Let my

body be [too much] for her, not my *arma* . . . / For it breaks my heart more than blows of the rod / that, there where she is, her slave cannot enter). And he expresses his determination to fulfill his desire (stanza 3, lines 5–6): *Totz temps serai ab lieis cum carns et on gla, / e non creirai chastic d'amic ni d'oncle* (All time would I be with her like the flesh and nail, / and I will hear no chastising of friend nor of uncle). In stanza 4 he voices his astonishment at the strength of his love: *De mi pot far l'amors q'inz el cor m'intra / miells a son vol* . . . (For the love which enters my heart can do with me / more, at his will, than a strong man . . .).<sup>42</sup>

The two melodic lines corresponding to these stanzas, first move away from each other (at syllables 1 and 2), and then move toward one another (syllables 2 to 3). Moving in oblique and then similar motion, they meet at syllable 5 on the unison pitch F. Similar motion continues the picture, with a brief contrary crossing at syllables 8 to 9 and contrary motion toward one another at syllables 9 to 10. Significantly, the two lines move in unison on the last three pitches to the unison close at syllable 11 on the pitch F.

The persona voices no more thought of obstacles in the final two stanzas of text. The contours of the closing pair of melodic lines (Figure 3) likewise encounter no obstacles; they begin with a movement of contrary motion toward one another, cross closely at syllable 3 on the two-note-neumes D-E and E-D, and then join in unison at syllable 4 on the pitch C.

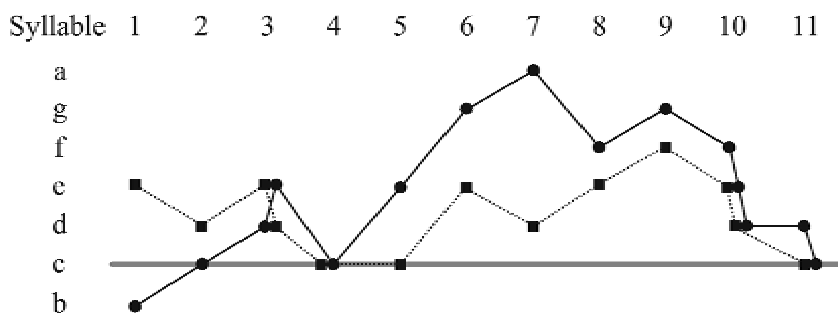


Figure 3. Arnaut Daniel, “Lo ferm voler,” melodic contour, paired lines 5 (■·····■) and 6 (●—●)

After the unison C at syllable 4, the lines move only once more away from one another, at syllables 6 to 7. The remainder of the structure shows movement of the lines in contrary motion toward one another, followed by close parallel, similar,

<sup>42</sup> Jernigan, “The Song of the Nail and the Uncle,” 139–41.

oblique, and unison motion, illustrating in sound the metaphors of closeness in stanzas 5 and 6. Furthermore, line 6, at syllables 5 through 11, achieves and maintains a range higher than or equal to that of line 5, supporting the innuendo of the the joyous, emphatic rhetoric of stanza 6, with its mention of *ioi* (joy), *double ioi* (double joy), and *paradis* (paradise), and reinforcing the image of the fulfillment of the persona's determined desire.

The three graphs (Figures 1, 2, and 3) support Spanos's summary of the progression of ideas in the poem: the working out of a "binary opposition between the words associated with *ferm voler* and those associated with an intrusive external material reality which prevents the fulfillment of *voler*." In Spanos's view, the obstacles to *voler*, "elements of inimical reality" are "gradually encompassed in the poetic framework of the fantasy of desire" and are thus "engulfed" and integrated into *voler's* desired fulfillment, as illustrated particularly in Figure 3, where the melodic structure of the piece enacts (in a sense) the sexual meaning of the text.<sup>43</sup>

The concluding three-line tornada, notes Spanos, formalizes the "final resolution" of the "tense relationship of the will and its obstacles" fixing them in a new harmonious order.<sup>44</sup> These three lines, sung to the last three lines of the melody, have long been considered especially difficult by various critics attempting to understand the poem within the traditional courtly topos of the canso.<sup>45</sup>

Jernigan asserts, however, that the tornada is "the key to the poem's true meaning," and that "here Arnaut drops all pretense and writes on the sexual level alone":<sup>46</sup>

Arnautz tramet sa chansson d'ongl'e d'oncle,  
a grat de lieis que de sa verg'a l'arma  
son Desirat, cui pretz en cambra intra.

[Arnaut sends his song of nail and uncle  
for the pleasure of her who has the *arma* of his rod,  
his *Desirat*, whose praise enters the chamber.]<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> An audience hearing the song would not consciously register the "narratives" created by the three pairs of melodic lines drafted in Figures 1, 2, and 3; however, given Arnaut's careful design of the text, I suggest that the poet-composer was well aware of every aspect of the musical setting.

<sup>44</sup> Spanos, "The Sestina: An Exploration," 550.

<sup>45</sup> Jernigan, "The Song of the Nail and Uncle," 146–47.

<sup>46</sup> Jernigan, "The Song of the Nail and Uncle," 147. A similar dropping of the pretense of *fin'amor* occurs in the second part of the late medieval *Roman de la rose*, where the second author, Jeun de Meun dispenses with Guillaume de Lorris's courtly and rhetorical pretense and "addresses the basic sexual nature of the erotic discourse," as Classen notes in his Introduction to this volume.

<sup>47</sup> Jernigan, "The Song of the Nail and the Uncle," 145.

Just how far a performer might want to take his interpretation in singing the closing tornada remains a matter of artistic judgment. Zuchetto, for example, having gone all out in stanza 6 with its marked drum accompaniment and emphatic recitation of the text, shifts to a dramatically contrasting, unaccompanied presentation in the self-referential tornada, in which Arnaut signs his own name and also directly addresses his *Desirat* (desired one).<sup>48</sup> Zuchetto's "naked" rendering of the closing three lines is in keeping with Jernigan's evaluation of the tornada as dropping all pretense. Rather than an innocent and bashful Parzival standing in front of young ladies,<sup>49</sup> we see (or hear) the lover's conscious declaration of desire.

Both Arnaut's first-person *sestina* and Audefroï's third-person narrative play with the conventions of courtly love, expressing the "continuous undercurrent" of tension between sexual desire and its fulfillment while retaining the deniability Christoph considers a necessary criterion for innuendo.<sup>50</sup> The music of these songs provides more than a mere vehicle for the poems. Through structural features and foreground gestures, both musical settings act as equal partners to the words, realize their texts in the immediate phenomenon of sound, and provide a performative, suggestive "nod," allowing their audience direct perception of the tensions and humor inherent in the paradox of *fin'amor*.

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<sup>48</sup> Zuchetto, *Chante les troubadours*.

<sup>49</sup> See Christoph's essay in this volume for a discussion of innuendo in this scene from Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. See also Classen's contribution, "Naked Men" for an analysis of nakedness in its sexual, moral, and ethical context.

<sup>50</sup> Again, see Christoph's essay in this volume.



## Appendix A

Audefroï le Bâtard, *Bele Ysabiauz, pucele bien apprise* (R1616, L 15–5)

Text and translation from Samuel N. Rosenberg, Margaret Switten, and Gerard Le Vot, eds. *Songs of the Troubadours and Trouvères: An Anthology of Poems and Melodies*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities Volume 1740 (New York and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1998), 286–88.

Bele Ysabiauz, pucele bien apprise,  
 Ama Gerart et il li en tel guise  
 C'ainc de folour par lui ne fu requise,  
 Ainz l'ama de si bone amour  
 Que mieuz de li guarda s'ounour.  
*Et joie atent Gerars.*

Quant pluz se fu bond amours entr'eus mise,  
 Par loiauté afermee et reprise,  
 En cele amour la damoisele ont prise  
 Si parent et douné seignour,  
 Outre son gré, un vavassour.  
*Et joie atent Gerars.*

Quant sot Gerars, cui fine amour justise,  
 Que la bele fu a seigneur tramise,  
 Grains et mariz fist tant par sa maistrise  
 Que a sa dame en un destour  
 A fait sa plainte et sa clamour.  
*Et joie atent Gerars.*

“Amis Gerart, n'aiez ja couvoitise  
 De ce vouloir dont ainc ne fui requise.  
 Puis que je ai seigneur qui m'aimme et prise,  
 Bien doi estre de tel valour  
 Que je ne doi penser folour.”  
*Et joie atent Gerars.*

“Amis Gerart, faites ma conmandise:  
 Ralez vous ent, si feroiz grant franchise.  
 Morte m'avriez s'od vous estoie prise.  
 Maiz metez vous tost u retour;  
 Je vous conmant au Creatour.”  
*Et joie atent Gerars.*  
 “Dame, l'amour qu'ailleurs avez assise

Deüsse avoir par loiauté conquise;  
 Maiz pluz vous truis dure que pierre bise,  
 S'en ai au cuer si grant dolour  
 Qu'a biau samblant souspir et plour."

*Et joie atent Gerars.*

"Dame, pour Dieu," fait Gerars sanz faintise,  
 "Aiez de moi pitié par vo franchise.  
 La vostre amour me destraint et atise,  
 Et pour vous sui en tel errour  
 Que nus ne puet estre en greignour."

*Et joie atent Gerars.*

Quant voit Gerars, qui fine amours justise,  
 Que sa dolour de noient n'apetise,  
 Lors se croisa de duel et d'ire esprise,  
 Et pourquiert ainsi son atour  
 Que il puist movoir a brief jour.

*Et joie atent Gerars.*

Tost muet Gerars, tost a sa voie quise;  
 Avant tramet son esquire Denise  
 A sa dame parler par sa franchise.  
 La dame ert ja pour la verdour  
 En un vergier cueillir la flour.

*Et joie atent Gerars.*

Vestue fu la dame par cointise;  
 Mout ert bele, grasse, gente et alise;  
 Le vis avoit vermeil come cerise,  
 "Dame," dit il, "que tres bon jour  
 Vous doint cil qui j'aim et aour!"

*Et joie atent Gerars.*

"Dame, pour Deu," fait Gerars sanz faintise,  
 "D'outre mer ai pour vous la voie emprise."  
 La dame l'ot, mieus vousist ester ocise.  
 Si s'entrebaissent par douçour  
 Qu'andui cheïrent en l'erbour.

*Et joie atent Gerars.*

Ses maris voit la folour entreprise;  
 Pour voir cuide la dame morte gise  
 Les son ami. Tant se het et desprise  
 Qu'il pert sa force et sa vigour  
 Et muert de duel en tel errour.

*Et joie atent Gerars.*

De pasmoisons lievent par tel devise  
 Qu'il firent faire au mort tout son servise.  
 Li deus remaint. Gerars par sainte eglise  
 A fait de sa dame s'oissour.  
 Ce tesmoignent li ancissour.  
*Or a joie Gerars.*

## Translation

Lovely Isabel, a well-bred maiden,  
 loved Gerard, and he loved her in such a way  
 that he never asked her for anything improper;  
 indeed, his love was so true  
 that he guarded her honor even better than she.  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

When each was sure of the other's true love,  
 faithfully declared and repeated,  
 just then the young lady's parents took her  
 and married her off, against her will,  
 to a country squire.  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

When Gerard, in the grip of pure love, learned  
 that his sweetheart now had a husband,  
 stunned and dejected he did whatever he could  
 to meet his lady in a secluded spot  
 and cry out his sorrow.  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

"Dear Gerard, put aside any desire  
 to seek from me that which you have never sought.  
 now that I have a husband who loves and respects me,  
 I am duty-bound to guard my virtue  
 and put folly out of my mind."  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

"Dear Gerard, do as I ask:  
 go home now, and you will be doing a noble thing.  
 You would only kill me to take me away.  
 Now start on your way back;

I commend you to God."  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

"My lady, my loyalty should have won me  
the love that you have given to another man;  
I find you harder than stone,  
and there is such pain in my heart  
that, as you see, I can only sigh and weep."  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

"My lady, for God's sake," said Gerard earnestly,  
"take pity on me, noble soul that you are.  
Love for you torments me with its flames,  
and because of you I am more bewildered  
than any man has ever been."  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

When Gerard, tortured by true love, saw  
that his pain was not in the least abating,  
then, in sorrow and grief, he took the cross  
and began making ready  
to set out very soon.  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

Gerard started out, Gerard was on his way;  
he sent his squire Dennis ahead  
to announce him to his lady.  
The lady, with everything in bloom,  
was in her garden picking flowers.  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

The lady was wearing elegant clothes; she was  
full of body, lovely, smooth-skinned and graceful;  
Her cheeks were cherry-red.  
"My lady," he said, "may God, whom I love and  
worship, grant you a good day!"  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

"My lady, for God's sake," said Gerard earnestly,  
"I have decided, because of you, to go across the sea."  
At those words, the lady would have rather been killed.  
The two locked together in such an ardent embrace

that they both fell to the ground.  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

Her husband saw the folly under way  
but truly believed the lady lay dead  
beside her lover. He so blamed and berated himself  
that he lost all his strength and vitality  
and in his bewilderment died of grief.  
*And Gerard waited for his bliss.*

The lovers rose from their swoon and saw to it  
that the dead man was properly buried.  
Their grieving came to an end. With holy blessing  
Gerard took his lady to wife.  
That is the story that has come down to us.  
*Now Gerard had his bliss.*

## Appendix B

Arnaut Daniel, *Lo ferm voler q'el cor m'intra* (PC 29.14)

Text and translation from Charles Jernigan, "The Song of the Nail and Uncle: Arnaut Daniel's sestina 'Lo ferm voler q'el cor m'intra,'" *Studies in Philology* 71, 2 (April 1974): 127–51.

Lo ferm voler q'el cor m'intra  
no.m pot ies becs escoissendre ni on gla  
de lausengier, qui pert per mal dir s'arma;  
e car non l'aus batr'ab ram ni ab verga,  
sivals a frau, lai on non aurai oncle,  
iauzirai ioi, en vergier o dinz cambra.

Qan mi soven de la cambra  
on a mon dan sai que nuills hom non intra  
anz me son tuich plus que fraire ni oncle,  
non ai membre no.m fremisca, neis l'ongla,  
aissi cum fai l'enfas denant la verga:  
tal paor ai qu'eill sia trop de l'arma.

Del cors li fos, non de l'arma,  
e cossentis m'a celat dinz sa cambra!  
Que plus mi nafra.l cor que colps de verga  
car lo sieus sers lai on ill es non intra;  
totz temps serai ab lieis cum carns et on gla,  
e non creirai chastic d'amic ni d'oncle.

Anc la seror de mon oncle  
non amei plus ni t ant, per aqest'arma!  
C'aitant vezis cum es lo detz de l'ongla,  
s'a liei plagues, volgr'esser de sa cambra;  
de mi pot far l'amors q'inz el cor m'intra  
mieills a son vol c'om fortz de frevol verga.

Pois flori la seca verga  
ni d'en Adam mogron nebot ni oncle,  
tant fin'amors cum cella q'el cor m'intra  
non cuig fos anc en cors, ni eis en arma;  
on q'ill estei, fors en plaz', o dins cambra,  
mos cors no.is part de lieis tant cum ten l'ongla.

C'aissi s'enpren e s'enongla  
 mos cors en lei cum l'escorss' en la verga;  
 q'ill m'es de ioi tors e palaitz e cambra,  
 e non am tant fraire, paren ni oncle:  
 q'en paradis n'aura doble ioi m'arma,  
 si ia nuills hom per ben amar lai intra.

Arnautz tramet sa chanson d'ongl'e d'oncle,  
 a grat de lieis que de sa verg'a l'arma  
 son Desirat, cui pretz en cambra intra.

### Translation

The firm desire which enters my heart  
 cannot be ripped out by the flatterer's beak or nail,  
 who loses his *arma*\* for his ill-speech;  
 and since I dare not beat him with a switch or a rod,  
 secretly at least, there where I would have no uncle,  
 will I enjoy love's joy, in a garden or within a chamber.

Whenever I think of the chamber  
 where to my harm I know that no man enters  
 yet all are to me more than a brother or uncle,  
 I have no member which does not tremble, down to my nail  
 just like the child before the rod:  
 such fear have I that my *arma* is too much for her.

Let my body be [too much] for her, not my *arma*  
 and she would allow me secretly within her chamber!  
 For it breaks my heart more than blows of the rod  
 that, there where she is, her slave cannot enter;  
 all time would I be with her like the flesh and nail,  
 and I will hear no chastising of friend nor of uncle.

Even the sister of my uncle  
 I did not love more or even as much, by this *arma*!  
 And as close as the finger is to the nail  
 if it pleases her, would I be to her chamber;  
 for the love which enters my heart can do with me  
 more, at his will, than a strong man [can do] with a feeble rod.

Since the dry rod flowered,  
 and from Adam descended nephews and uncles,  
 such a true love as that which enters my heart,

was not, I think in a body, nor even in an *arma*;  
wherever she is, out in the plaza, or in her chamber,  
my body is not apart from her by so much as the length of a nail.

My body is just as rooted and enfingernailed  
in her as the bark on the rod [branch];  
for she is my tower, palace and chamber of joy,  
and I do not love brother, parent, nor uncle so much;  
and my *arma* will have double joy of her in paradise,  
if ever a man enters there for loving well.

Arnaut sends his song of nail and uncle  
for the pleasure of her who has the *arma* of his rod,  
his Desirat, whose praise enters the chamber.

\*Jernigan considers the word *arma* untranslatable.





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## A Vision of “Sexuality,” “Obscenity” or “Nudity”? Regional Differences in the Images of Corbels

Corbels are some of the most stunning and surprising examples of public images of “sexuality” in the Middle Ages. They shamelessly expose nudity and the sexual attributes of both clerical and civil subjects. Located mostly under a cornice, originally in the high parts of Romanesque buildings and later on Gothic buildings, the stone or wood corbel and its iconography never faces the spectator, but looms above his head. It is mostly encountered on churches, but corbels also decorate civil architecture.

If we keep in mind that sexuality in the Middle Ages is generally not a public affair, though discussed very often both from a learned (clerical) and vernacular (literary) perspective,<sup>1</sup> the fact that these images are exposed outside, out of context, makes the obscene corbels offensive. Therefore, although considered as minor sculptures, corbels have been studied by many scholars for their notorious display of unclothed bodies carved in the most incredible positions, some of them explicitly presenting their genitals or mimicking sexual acts.<sup>2</sup> According to the moral teaching of the Catholic Church, these representations are often interpreted as symbols for the condemnation of sexual activities and vices.

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<sup>1</sup> This essay would not have been possible without the invaluable insights, guidance and patience of Albrecht Classen. Thanks are also due to Marilyn Sandidge for her helpful comments. I am particularly grateful to Laurent Dusseau for his constant help and his instructive suggestions. Thanks also to Sarah and Nicole for their translation assistance. See the Introduction to this volume by Albrecht Classen; see also the contribution to this volume by Peter Dinzelbacher for a theological-political perspective regarding allegedly perverted forms of sexuality among heretics.

<sup>2</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Asa Simon Mittman and Susan M. Kim.

However the constitution of a corpus of corbels in the Midi (the name of southern France) clearly indicates that the concepts of body and sexuality were certainly not the same in the South-East as in the South-West of France. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to make a clear difference between nudity, obscenity and sexuality. Sexuality can be clearly displayed: sexual intercourse, masturbation, fellatio. In this case, the interpretation is obvious. Obscenity derives from gesture. The act of displaying sexual organs or bottoms is not necessarily related to sexuality. It can be a provocation, a joke, or an insult. The concept of nudity covers obscenity and sexuality, but also many other significations. It is a much broader subject in which one can see eroticism in its symbolic dimension, or simply nudity. Nude characters with clear sexual intention actually appear quite often in Aquitaine and Northern Spain, whereas in the Midi few corbels depict elements of nudity. Obscenity is even less often described, and explicit sexuality is obviously entirely banned. Hence, the interpretation of nudity fluctuates from one region to another, with clear borders between two neighboring areas. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the reasons for such local specifics, which implies that different contexts (historical, moral, or other) may have influenced the messages, leading to many different ways of interpreting sexuality during the Middle Ages.

In order to highlight the distinctiveness of the Midi, it is necessary to give an overview of the iconography of corbels in the neighboring regions first, Aquitaine and northern Spain, based on the results of art-historical research.

Corbels of Aquitaine are the most frequently studied and of course, scholars often focus on obscene topics. Christian Bougoux's book<sup>3</sup> provides an excellent overview of all Romanesque corbels and other sculptures in the "duché d'Aquitaine" showing characters in suggestive positions or exposing their sexual organs. The "non-scholar" author describes the local sculpture providing only some brief interpretation. Aquitaine was also extensively studied by subsequent art historians. Nurith Kenaan-Kedar has put together a corpus of corbels depicting human themes for churches in Saintonge and in Poitou,<sup>4</sup> incorporating some

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<sup>3</sup> Christian Bougoux, *Petite grammaire de l'obscène, églises du duché d'Aquitaine: XIe/XIIe siècles* (Bordeaux: Collection Archipel Roman, Bellus, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, *Marginal Sculpture in Medieval France, Towards the Deciphering of an Enigmatic Pictorial Language* (Aldershot, England, and Brookfield, VT: Scolar Press, 1995), and Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, "Les modillons de Saintonge et du Poitou comme manifestation de la culture laïque," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale, Xème–XIIème siècles* XXIX, 4, (1986): 311–30. These writings deal with specific corbel subjects: portraits, acrobats including obscene ones, musicians, but never mention animals, flowers or geometric themes. The author believes that many heads are the artist's self portraits. Combined with the marginal themes, artists present their own image in their own marginal society, rejected as were acrobats or musicians. In this case, corbels may represent the image of secularism rather than the image of vice as suggested by many authors,

indecent ones. The whole corpus of Romanesque sculpture of Aquitaine, including various corbels, is the topic of the book by Jacques Lacoste<sup>5</sup> that nicely complements Nurith Kenaan-Kedar's studies.

Licentious iconographies can also be found on churches in Northern Spain. Horst Bredekamp has published articles about the "shameless" corbels of San Martin de Frómista and other monuments of Northern Spain.<sup>6</sup>

This research makes it possible to draw a broad picture of "obscene and sexual" corbels in Aquitaine and in Northern Spain.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless all these studies have failed to include any comparison with the corbels found outside the borders of their regions of interest and never studied corbels globally. Instead, they focus on a pre-set catalogue of iconographical elements. Nor have they mentioned in any way the lack of obscene iconography in the Midi of France. As a consequence, these studies misrepresent corbels, which are not necessarily always, everywhere decorated with obscene themes.

To summarize the current research, the corpus of obscene topics on the Aquitaine and Spanish Romanesque churches groups many corbels depicting human figures, clothed or naked, in various positions: upside down, their back turned to the spectator or legs apart, showing their crotches. All these acrobats

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ecclesiastics and others.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacoste, *L'imaginaire et la foi. La sculpture romane en Saintonge* (Tours: Christian Pirot, 1998), and Jacques Lacoste, *Les maîtres de la sculpture romane dans l'Espagne du pèlerinage à Compostelle* (Bordeaux: Ed. Sud Ouest, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Horst Bredekamp, "Wallfahrt als Versuchung, San Martin de Fromista," *Kunstgeschichte, aber wie?* (Berlin: Reimer, 1989), 221–58; id.: "Die nordspanische Hofskulptur und die Freiheit der Bildhauer," *Studien zur Geschichte der Europäischen Skulptur im 12./13. Jahrhundert*, ed. Herbert Beck and Kerstin Hengevoss-Dürkop, together with Georg Kamp. Schriften des Liebieghauses (Frankfurt a. M.: Henrich, 1994), 267–74.

<sup>7</sup> It includes some older succinct descriptions by authors and erudites of the nineteenth and beginning of twentieth centuries: Léo Drouyn, *Variétés girondines* (Bordeaux: Feret et fils, 1878), tome 1, 432. He relates, about the Romanesque church of Lugaïnac (Gironde), that the seventh of twenty-nine corbels is censured: "7e Obscenum virile qu'on doit renoncer à décrire et à dessiner;" among the sixteen corbels of Courpiac, there is also a corbel showing a couple that the author cannot describe ("un couple qu'il faut renoncer à décrire"). Jean-Auguste Brutails, *Les vieilles églises de la Gironde* (Bordeaux: Feret et fils, 1912), 229. He wrote: "Ils sont trop nombreux les modillons de nos églises du XIIe siècle pareils à cette sculpture polissonne dont il est parlé dans L'Orme du Mail, que les érudits locaux montrent aux étrangers lorsque les dames regardent ailleurs" and l'abbé Charles-Auguste Auber, *Histoire et théorie du symbolisme religieux avant et depuis le christianisme, L'explication de tous les moyens symboliques employés dans l'art plastique monumental ou décoratif chez les anciens et les modernes avec les principes de leur application à toutes les parties de l'art chrétien d'après la Bible, les artistes païens, les Pères de l'Église, les légendes et la pratique du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance* (Paris: Ed. Librairie Franck and Librairie Dupre, 1871, reprint Milan: Archè, 1977), III, chapter 11, 'Des Obscoena', 404–38. From the same author: "Des modillons dans l'architecture chrétienne et en particulier de ceux de la nouvelle façade de l'église Saint-Jacques de Chatelleraut," *Bulletin monumental, Caen* 8 (1863): 371–75, and id., "Restauration, l'entretien et la décoration des églises," *Bulletin Monumental, Caen* 8 (1851): 5–37.

could be qualified as obscene. Other corbels, including some very explicit ones, show two people in what may be interpreted as the representation of couples in different positions of intercourse (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). These corbels suggest sexuality. Some others showing similar iconographies (masturbating figures or two corbels side by side, one figure a woman and the other one a man, lifting up their clothes to reveal their nudity) also fit into this category (Fig. 3–5). A few corbels, depicting for instance women with snakes or toads on their breasts, could be interpreted without doubt as images of sin. The most daring stones simply representing female or male organs could be obscene or not.

Some authors have already provided possible explanations for these images, as in the paper by Marco Burrini,<sup>8</sup> relative to corbels, including obscene ones, and their origins along the pilgrimage road of Saint-Jacques de Compostella. Marco Burrini suggests that the Kama Sutra could be the inspiration source for saucy corbels, which is more than questionable, despite some iconographic similarities, which are, however, purely accidental.<sup>9</sup>

The latest study by Claudio Lange, “Der nackte Feind: Anti-Islam in der romanischen Kunst,”<sup>10</sup> is disputed by many scholars, like the French medievalist Jean Claude Schmitt. Referring to the same images located in Spain, in Aquitaine and isolated images from other locations, Claudio Lange suggests (as others have done before him) that the obscene figures on Romanesque churches of the twelfth century are the image of vices, used to illustrate the banned temptations. For Lange, the exhibition of obscene topics may suggest anti-Islamic propaganda. The enemy is pictured as an obscene character, naked and wretched. The enemy, exhibiting his genitals as a sign of immorality, is dishonored and vulnerable. This new theory of Lange sounds rather unfounded<sup>11</sup> and remains unproven.

By contrast, the subject of some sexually oriented images is so explicit that there is no other possible interpretation as to be the reprobation of sexual intercourse. In Aquitaine and Northern Spain, the repetition of this kind of image accounts for the builders will to propagate a strong message. On the apse of Santa Maria de Uncastillo in Aragon (Fig. 6) a stone depicts a cleric and a woman making love.

<sup>8</sup> Marco Burrini, “Le sacré et le profane sur la route des pèlerins,” *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa* XXXI (2000): 97–110.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre-Louis Giannerini, *Amour et érotisme dans la sculpture romane* (Oloron-Sainte-Marie, Pau: Giannerini, 2000), a “non-scholar” continues Bougoux’s work with references to Burrini’s Kama Sutra hypothesis and gives a general survey of erotic themes on religious monuments in all regions and on all supports.

<sup>10</sup> Claudio Lange, *Der nackte Feind, Anti-Islam in der romanischen Kunst* (Berlin: Parthas Verlag, 2004); id., “Plastischer Kirchenschmuck und Islam,” *Liebesfreuden im Mittelalter, Kulturgeschichte der Erotik und Sexualität in Bildern und Dokumenten* (Munich: Orbis, 2001), 97–120.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, a female representation on a corbel of Saint-Sernin de Toulouse, that will be discussed later in this paper, is said to be the representation of a prostitute by Claudio Lange without any justification.

Behind the woman with long hair down her back, a snake sticks its tongue into her ear. This kind of sinning couple could surely be interpreted as a representation of carnal sin, and numerous Romanesque iconographies treat nudity as equal to sin. The sinners entering in the “*bouche d’enfer*” depicted as a big mouth of a monstrous animal are naked (Fig. 7). These kinds of carved figures on churches are obviously there to teach Biblical concepts to the masses. The meaning of them is well-known and explicit, that is warning against lust, luxury and licentiousness. Surprisingly, in the Midi, things are quite different. Some obscene-like images can be found but the meaning of these figures is never clear and could be quite different.

It is important to remember that most of these corbels were sculpted during the twelfth century, and predate most erotic *fabliaux*, and erotic poems or lyrics, written at the end of the twelfth century.<sup>12</sup> Thus it is very unlikely that this kind of literature could have had a real impact on the Romanesque corbels or their authors (clerical or civil supervisors in charge of choosing an iconography for their church or chapel, artists who sculpted the corbel). Courtly love, described by the twelfth-century troubadours in lyric poems for aristocratic circles, seems not have had any influence on corbels. But we cannot exclude the possibility of oral influence by the “*trouvères*” who could have told erotic stories to “corbel artists” also considered as marginal, like the “*trouvère*.” Acrobats are often depicted as “obscene” characters on corbels. They could also acrobatically reveal their sexual attributes. But if we are looking for literary sources for corbels, they are primarily Biblical texts, hagiographies, and writings from clerics or from classical-ancient authors; other sources could come from manuscript pictures, where nudity is generally associated with sinners as in sculpture.

There is no doubt about it: Aquitaine and Spain seem to have enjoyed obscene corbels. Further investigations have shown that obscene images also appear on churches in the British Isles, especially in Ireland.<sup>13</sup> But there nakedness is exposed in quite a different way. British and Irish corbels usually show one naked human figure, male or female, and the rare couples that do appear are never having sexual intercourse (Fig. 8); instead they only show their genitals side by side with no intention of sexual “*mise en scène*.”<sup>14</sup> So the intention behind the image seems to

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<sup>12</sup> See the contributions to this volume by Sarah Gordon and Suzanne Kocher, though the latter does not deal with *fabliaux* as such.

<sup>13</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Asa Simon Mittman and Susan M. Kim.

<sup>14</sup> Except some cases of “copies” of Aquitaine corbels. A corbel under the cornice of the south side of the nave of the Romanesque church St Nicholas in Studland (Dorset) depicts a naked couple having intercourse. This kissing couple is a real copy of the couples we can find on the corbels in Northern Spain and Aquitaine. In Dorset, a corbel depicts also a kissing couple in an X-position (called sometimes X-couple). A corbel of Ancaster, Lincolnshire and a corbel of Kilpeck could also

differ from the clear Aquitaine denunciation of carnal sin or the sexual act. The opposition between images of nudity/sexuality from Aquitaine and from Britain-Ireland already augurs the considerable differences in the way various European regions consider sexuality and allow artists to express it in their works.

Furthermore, it is also striking to discover some geographically “obscene-free zones” (though not sex-free at all), as in the case of the Midi. The Midi<sup>15</sup> is an interesting area for comparison, geographically speaking right next to Aquitaine and Northern Spain, crossed by medieval roads (used by pilgrims, crusaders, merchants, artists of all nationalities) and open on the Mediterranean side to many influences.

The Midi offers a wide range of corbels, from the end of the eleventh century—they are the earliest corbels in the region, but also in France—on Romanesque churches, showing tiny human heads and small effigies of monkeys, bulls and bears), to the fifteenth century with its stone and wooden corbels, characterized by many different themes. This corpus of Romanesque and Gothic corbels<sup>16</sup> in the Midi is characterized by a quasi-absence of nudity that turned out to be a recurring feature on all monumental sculptures. Among 150 churches and thousands of corbels, only very few could possibly be considered as obscene. The small corpus of corbels exhibiting the idea of nudity in the Midi is quite different from the corbels observed in Spain and Aquitaine. Stylistic as well as symbolic differences are certainly due to different influences and origins.

In the Midi, the following iconography linked to nudity/obscenity has been found: acrobats, bottoms, mermaids, veiled female busts revealing a naked breast and female exhibitionist/Sheela-na-gig.

## Acrobats

The obscene acrobats widespread in Aquitaine can be found in a very simplified version in the Midi.<sup>17</sup> Among the Aquitaine obscene acrobats, only the revealing

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depict a couple doing a sexual act, but there is no intercourse. Woman and man are wearing clothes and just touching one another.

<sup>15</sup> The following regions have been studied: Languedoc, Roussillon, Gévaudan, Vivarais, Provence, Ariège and some Pyrenean regions as the Bearn.

<sup>16</sup> The usual iconography of corbels in the Midi depicts humans and animals living side by side; leaves, fruits or geometric patterns also appear sporadically. The presence of religious subjects refutes the theory that corbels mostly represent vices. The four evangelists can quite often be seen. The “agnus dei” and some “symbolic or holy characters” (Pierre, Abraham, David or Samson) can also be found.

<sup>17</sup> Here, we will only discuss the naked acrobats of the Midi (there are also a few dressed ones).

positions remain with no detail and no nice clothes lifted up to reveal the sex of the acrobat. Of hundreds of corbels, less than ten corbels present an obscene acrobat. Moreover, these obscene acrobats are not located in the same area.

A single one could be found in Provence, a little acrobat on the south porch of Notre-Dame du Lac du Thor, represented head down, legs up. The stone is too damaged to describe the nude body any further (Fig. 9).

Some acrobats were found in the Gevaudan. On the south door of Lespéron, an acrobat is represented upside down (his crossed arms supporting his head), legs up (knees facing the spectator) and apart so that the genitals are visible (Fig. 10). In Albaret Sainte-Marie, an acrobat offers his back, his tiny arms lifting up his legs. The lines of the bottom and the legs form a mermaid-like bifid tail.<sup>18</sup> A corbel of the church of Albaret-le-Comtal represents an isolated example of a really obscene acrobat. The acrobat seems to hang by his hands and feet from the four corners of the corbel, exposing his back. In this position, the legs are wide open to let the phallus show (Fig. 11). The position is quite different from the favorite "legs up" adopted by the acrobats in Aquitaine. The attitude recalls sculpted devils hanging on capitals or other supports.

In the Haut-Languedoc, in Lescure, a corbel of the apse represents a monkey-like person crouched down in a shameless position. Under the big head, the legs wide apart reveal a long male member.

One of the latest examples comes from Mirepoix, *Maison des Consuls*, a late Gothic construction. An exhibitionist acrobat, head down, supports the abacus with his back and exhibits his bottom and his damaged male genitals (Fig. 12).

Corbels as well as other monumental sculptures often transcribe architectural function. Crouched positions may have been adopted for technical reasons: they make a perfect fit with the shape of the corbels and are a perfect iconography for these stones. The human body crouched in a contortion supports the weight of the cornice with his feet or his back. Sometimes it is difficult to decide whether the corbel represents an acrobat or an atlante. Due to the contorted position, no additional item is needed to identify the acrobat which makes the subject easy enough to sculpt<sup>19</sup> for a common artist.

However, careful interpretation is important, as each case has a very different symbolism.

Geographically extending the search for iconography, it is worth noting that in the Pyrenean regions, specially the region directly connecting the Midi to Aquitaine and Northern Spain, acrobats appear more often on corbels than

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<sup>18</sup> This iconography could be inspired by the observation of the position of a mermaid, sculpted on a capital of the same church.

<sup>19</sup> Henri Focillon had already underlined it very well in his study "Apôtres et jongleurs romans," *Revue de l'art ancien et modern* LV (1929): 13–28.



anywhere else in the Midi. Also they expose their genitals to the spectators more frequently. In Assouste, in Béarn, on a corbel of the south door, an upside-down acrobat has his head on his crotch, so the chin is over the anus. Three corbels of the Pyrenean church of Aucun show three different positions. The first one has his legs up and shows his phallus. The second is displayed with his legs wide apart and reveals his faded phallus. Both can be found on the Romanesque apse. The third one, on the second Gothic apse, has its back to the spectator. Its head appears between the legs and thus the character divulges its identity. In fact, it is a woman spreading out her female genitalia with her hands. The small chapel of Jouers in Béarn gives evidence of the sculptural difference existing between the corbels in Aquitaine and the ones in the Midi. In Jouers, the acrobat lifts up his legs and shamelessly exposes his genitals partially covered by the chin. This is a very realistic example of an obscene acrobat (Fig. 13).

The acrobats pictured in suggestive positions are able to reveal their crotch. It is not always possible for the dressed ones as they must lift up their clothes to do so. However, this subject has enabled me to set a geographic limit for my own research. Obscene acrobats appear only sporadically in the Midi and very late (end of the twelfth century or beginning of the thirteenth century). The churches presenting this iconography are located near Auvergne or the Toulousain, regions that have been subject to Aquitaine influences. It is more than curious that the acrobat and the naked character are missing in the corbel series of Saint-Sernin de Toulouse, a famous influential artistic center. It appears only once in a while in the corbel series of Cahors (Fig. 14) and is also missing under the cornices of Conques, other famous monuments.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, in Béarn, obscene acrobats are a more frequent *leitmotiv* of corbels. Béarn is located between the north of Spain and Aquitaine two regions linked up by the pilgrim road of Saint-Jacques. In these two regions, many churches like Bordeaux, Mérignac, Cardan, Saint-Palais, Aillas, Tayac, Vinax, Jaca or Fromista bear numerous obscene characters. Bearn has certainly absorbed these influences. Most acrobats studied are male, except for Aucun (Gothic apse) and Montfrin (corbels of Montfrin will be discussed below).

The dressed acrobat has antique precedents, like the atlas, so it is no surprise to see him appear on corbels in the Midi, rich with antique monuments (Fig. 15). The dressed acrobat is also similar to the Jocolator, ("jester") artist with many skills who could play music, write poetry, and perform acrobatics while being an animal tamer.<sup>21</sup> Jongleurs are omnipresent in Romanesque life and so it is not surprising to see them show up on the corbels as well. Acrobats often symbolize amusement and deformation. Deformation of mouths, big ears, gaping mouths and distorted

<sup>20</sup> In Cahors, a squatting and contorted figure turns into an obscene figure, because of its nudity. See Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, *Marginal Sculpture*, 61, Fig. 2.10 and 2.11.

<sup>21</sup> Edmond Faral, *Les jongleurs en France au Moyen Age* (Paris: Champion, 1964), 70–79 and 107–18.

bodies are typical of an abnormal person rejected by the community or a person possessed by vice. A twisted body soon becomes a twisted mind, a sign of a tormented soul.<sup>22</sup> In the manuscripts, as on the folio of the *Psalterium triplex* (from Reims, ms. B18, St. John's College, Cambridge, f.1) of the early twelfth century, the acrobat stands next to a beast and is painted in the lower half of the page illustrating sacred (played by David as musician) and profane music. The beast, the devil, a barrel around his neck, is accompanied by musicians and acrobats. Animal and carnal music leads to the licentious behavior with the body no longer under the control of the soul. The scene is highly moralizing, with the two tumblers to the left of the beast falling in the literal sense of the word. Above them the horn-blower alludes to hunting, reinforcing the sense of animality. In the upper half, a figure in an atlantal position helps David to hold the harp.

Atlantes and acrobats are ideal subjects for corbels, but also for every "small place" as the "lettrines" or margins in manuscripts or on the "dé" (small dice under the abacus) of capitals. An acrobat is depicted in the letter U in a *Biblia* (book 11) from the first half of the twelfth century, preserved in Angers,<sup>23</sup> and acrobats and atlantes are sculpted on the little rectangles in the place of the "dé" of two acanthus capitals in Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire.<sup>24</sup>

In the Midi, on corbels, atlantes outnumber acrobats because the figure of atlas emphasizes the weight these corbels are supporting. So it seems that the artists of Languedoc prefer to show the architectural function of corbels, rather than giving them a symbolic function or making them represent possessed beings as the corbels in Aquitaine or Spain do, according to the interpretation of Horst Bredekamp: "diese lustvollen Verrenkungen, die auf die Verdammungswürdigkeit der ungezügelter Körper verweisen und die zu tierischen Masken verzerrten Gesichter zeigen ihre dämonischen Besessenheit und können als Bannmittel von Ängsten angesehen werden, die vor allem die Wallfahrer mit sich herumtragen"<sup>25</sup> (These suggestive contortions indicate the damnation of the uninhibited wild bodies whose faces distorted into bestial masks show their demoniacal possession and could be considered as a remedy to ban the fears pilgrims carry with them on their way). The pilgrims of Languedoc may have been more confident and fearless; did they make no use of these kinds of images?

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<sup>22</sup> See Ingeborg Tetzlaff, *Romanische Kapitelle in Frankreich: Löwe und Schlange, Sirene und Engel* (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1976), 19. Die "geistige Verrenkung symbolisiert . . . die Ächtung der Kirche für den undogmatischen, d.h. ketzerischen Denker, vermischt mit, wenn auch ungewollter Hochachtung vor seiner unleugbaren geistigen Potenz."

<sup>23</sup> Angers, Bibliothèque municipale, ms 152, f.151.

<sup>24</sup> Marcel Durliat, "La sculpture du XI<sup>ème</sup> siècle en Occident," *Bulletin Monumental*, Caen CLII (1994): 129–213, 164, ill. 47 and 48.

<sup>25</sup> "Die nordspanische Hofskulptur," 263–74.

## Bottoms

The corbel of Chambonas in the Vivarais shows a very rare bawdy iconography, which could not be included in the series of acrobats. This corbel presents a nice bottom, on its own without a body or a head, but with hands. The hands grab the buttocks to spread them apart to reveal the anus. It is quite rare to find isolated representations of genitals or bottoms and it is very surprising to discover this iconography in the Vivarais, while only a few isolated cases can be detected in France and elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> Some of them have been studied in an excellent article by Michael Camille<sup>27</sup>. In the Midi, as elsewhere, a bottom is without doubt an obscene object, but what can it mean on an isolated corbel among a series of non-obscene corbels? Under the cornice of Chambonas, the bottom is associated with a corbel representing a head sticking out its tongue (Fig. 16). The grouping of both corbel iconographies, more than the isolated bottom, may help to find an explanation.

According to Pierre A. Clément and Claudiane Fabre-Martin, the two corbels propose a view of a traditional folkloric competition between the builders.<sup>28</sup> Could this local interpretation also be valid for other regions? Camille never mentions the bum of Chambonas. Nor does he describe the stones surrounding the bottoms in his research. Associated with the bottom, these stones could have clarified the interpretation. But if regional differences exist (and they surely do), may we

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<sup>26</sup> A corbel of the porch of Oakham (Rutland) depicts a bottom being shown and we can find another one on a corner carving of Syston (Lincolnshire). This carving shows a male, leaning forward and holding open his buttocks with both hands, displaying anus and genital organs.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Camille, "Dr Witkowski's Anus: French Doctors, German Homosexuals and the Obscene in Medieval Church Art," ed. Nicola F. McDonald (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press; Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 17–38, ill. 47 and 48. See also Michael Camille's excellent monograph on the margins, including corbels: *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> Pierre-A. Clément, *Eglise romanes oubliées du Bas Languedoc* (Montpellier: Les Presses du Languedoc, 1989), 198–99: "Ils se sont vraisemblablement inspirés des célèbres concours de grimaces qui, depuis des temps reculés, font partie intégrante du folklore de l'Uzège. Il ne se passait pas une fête de village sans que le public bon enfant ne se réjouisse des facéties rituelles des gais lurons de l'endroit. Immanquablement, le premier prix était décerné à celui qui avait exhibé la partie la plus charnue de son individu, devançant celui qui tirait la langue et celui qui fendait la gueule en écartelant sa bouche à deux mains. On peut imaginer que les tailleurs de pierre de Chambonas avaient assisté ou peut-être même participé à ce jeu lorsque l'on retrouve dans cet ordre sur le haut de l'abside les trois cas de figure, si l'on peut dire, habituellement primés". [They probably took as a starting point the famous grimace contests that, since remote time, are integral part of the folklore of the "Uzège". Every village festival taking place had an easy-going public delighted by the ritual jokes of the local jolly fellows. Inevitably, the first price was given to who had exhibited the fleshiest part of his body, preceding whom stretching out the tongue and the mouth-puller. One can imagine that the stone masons of Chambonas had attended or perhaps even taken part in this game, they placed these three primed topics side by side on the top of the apse]. The author unfortunately does not give the source used for this interpretation.

deduce that the medieval mentalities of Aquitaine/Spain on the one hand, and the Midi on the other, were quite different? In Aquitaine, one denounced sin, while in the Midi, one could simply have fun?

Curiously, the association of a bottom and a head sticking out a tongue comes back some centuries later in the so-called Baron Wittert's diptych,<sup>29</sup> preserved in the Bibliothèque Centrale de Liège (Fig. 17). This diptych dating from the sixteenth century, is surprisingly not cited by Camille. Closed, the diptych shows a character holding a warning banderole written in old Dutch: "Keep this panel closed, otherwise you will get angry about me." Inside the diptych, the left panel shows a naked bottom and a legend reads: "This is not my fault, I did warn you," and the right panel represents a character making faces, sticking out his tongue, and we can read the following legend: "the more we warn you, the more you want to jump out of the window."<sup>30</sup> According to France Capon, "this kind of subject is extremely rare in the sixteenth century."<sup>31</sup> The moralizing nature of this diptych is clear. The proverb wants to protect us from being attracted by prohibition. The iconography strengthens the proverb, but raises the question of the interpretation of the iconographic theme chosen aimlessly for the illustration of the proverb: scatological subject or homosexual subject?<sup>32</sup> At Chambonas, do the earlier versions of the same figures illustrate the same theme? If proverbs or exempla appear only later on, many paremiology specialists have shown the ancient sources dating back to antiquity<sup>33</sup> and that many proverbs, exempla or dicta are based on oral stories or popular tales. And we know some iconographic subjects inspired by this kind of stories, such as the illustrations of Aesop's *Fables*.

<sup>29</sup> The Baron Adrien Wittert (1823–1903) has left his immense collection (paintings, manuscripts, woodcuts, books) to the University of Liège, Belgium. Léon Dewez, *Les Peintures Anciennes de la collection Wittert Bibliotheca Universitatis Leodiensis* (Liège: Maison Desoer, 1949), n° 11, 31.

<sup>30</sup> The inscriptions are painted on banderoles at the bottom of each panel: "Laet dit bert gheslot(n) hange(n) . . . and "Mi te misdoene en wilt nyet sen fel. want ic u . . ."

<sup>31</sup> FranceCapon, " Diptyque satirique, anonyme flamand, " *Tableaux de la Collection Wittert. Collections artistiques de l'Université de Liège Galerie Wittert* (Liège:Université de Liège, 1997), 3, 10–11.

<sup>32</sup> SergeAlexandre and Jean-Patrick Duchesne, "La peinture et la sculpture. La donation Wittert," *Le Patrimoine artistique de l'Université de Liège*, (Liège: ed. du Perron, 1993), 30. See also, Claude Gaignebet and J. Dominique Lajoux, *Art profane et religion populaire au Moyen Age* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), Illustration on page 214.

<sup>33</sup> *Thesaurus proverbiorum medii aevi*, Lexikon der Sprichwörter des romanisch-germanischen Mittelalters, 13 vols. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995–2002); see also StithThompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* 6 vols. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1955–1958), and Taylor Archer, *The Proverb* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931); *Proverbes et dictions populaires aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, (Paris: Crapelet, 1831), 189–200.

But the little bum-barer of Chambonas must have a different meaning, unless he was a restored stone inspired by later iconography. Although we cannot provide a definitive interpretation, it is clear that it has been carved in a very different spirit to the corbels of Aquitaine or the bottoms of Bourges cited by Camille. An isolated case under the cornice and in the region, he does not denounce carnal sin and does not seem to refer to the history of Normandy, quoted to interpret the Bourges rears.<sup>34</sup>

## Mermaids

Symbol of temptation and lure, sirens are hybrid creatures, half animal (bird or fish) half woman with strong feminine identities. "La sirène ( . . . ) a une physionomie très étrange, car, au-dessus de la ceinture, elle est la plus belle créature du monde, faite à la ressemblance d'une femme: mais pour l'autre partie du corps, elle a l'allure d'un poisson ou d'un oiseau".<sup>35</sup> Supremely beautiful and seductive, the siren is also an image of vice and a metaphor of death because men have been lured to their doom by hearing the chants of sirens. Sirens lure their spectator away from the straight and narrow path and on to sin. Mermaids quite often appear on medieval carvings in church decoration. Imaginary creatures, sirens are described in the bestiary where they are quoted to illustrate moral points of Christian dogma. Sirens in Romanesque sculpture have one or two fishtails, there are also some bird-like sirens, inspired by the antique iconography. The tail of the fish sometimes recalls the body of a snake, another negative symbol.

Very few mermaids<sup>36</sup> were found on the corbels in the Midi, while they are a *leitmotiv* in Aquitaine. In Languedoc, they are represented with one or two fishtails but also like the original siren with the body of a bird. Mermaids appear in the second half of the twelfth century in Chassiers/Vivaraïs (with a vertical bifid tail); on the border of the Gévaudan and Rouergue, Perse (two mermaids with bifid

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Camille quotes the satire of Warner of Rouen "Satyra contra Morihut", see "Dr Witkowski's Anus: French Doctors, German Homosexuals and the Obscene in Medieval Church Art," *Medieval Obscenities*, 28. Warner of Rouen: *Moriuh: A Norman Latin Poem from the Early Eleventh Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1995). Lucien Musset, "Le satiriste Garnier de Rouen et son milieu (début du XIe siècle)", *Revue du Moyen Âge latin*, 10 (1954): 237-66. Henri Omont, "Satire de Garnier de Rouen contre le poète Moriuh (Xe-XIe siècle)," *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France*, T. XXXI, 1894 (Paris: Société de l'histoire de France, 1895).

<sup>35</sup> According to the "Bestiaire de Guillaume le Clerc," written in the beginning of the thirteenth century. See Gabriel Bianciotto, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Stock, 1980), 85-86.

<sup>36</sup> But some mermaids appear on other supports, for example on a capital from the cloister of Elne (Roussillon) or on the base of small columns of Saint-Christol d'Albion (Provence).

tails); and Saint-Saturnin de Lenne (one fishtail, between 1170 and 1180).<sup>37</sup> In the Haut-Languedoc, in Burlats a corner corbel of the north portal shows a mermaid lying down crossing her bifid tail. In La Salvetat (Montdragon), the subject is represented twice with vertical bifid tails in a female version with small breasts (Fig. 18) and a rather masculine version. Bird sirens can be found in Béziers (Fig. 19) and Montfrin (two bird sirens, sometimes called erroneously harpies,<sup>38</sup> on the same corbel).

In the twelfth century, especially on corbels, mermaids were the only real recurrent image to be found of women. The iconography of a mermaid is preferred to the iconography of the female head that will appear later in the thirteenth century. Mermaids are sexual creatures. They symbolize the sinning woman descending from original sin<sup>39</sup> and are the incarnation of temptation since antiquity and Homer's *Odyssey*,<sup>40</sup> but they are also common in Carolingian texts.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Pauline de laMalène, *Parcours romans en Rouergue* (Rodez: Editions du Rouergue, 2003), 317.

<sup>38</sup> Female geniuses with a raptor body, sharp-edged claws and women's heads, whose function was to guide the souls of the dead into hell. Maidservants of Zeus, they were born from Thaumais and Electre. Harpies appear in the initial and margins of Romansque manuscripts. See for example: Initial I of the scene showing Ruth and Elimelech on the road to Moab, Londres, BL Harley, ms. 4772, f.120v.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Horvat, Michel Pastoureau, *Figures romanes* (Paris: édition Seuil, 2001), 180.

<sup>40</sup> Since the time of Homer (eighth century B.C.E.), according to Gaston Duchet Suchaux and Michel Pastoureau, *Le bestiaire médiéval, Dictionnaire historique et bibliographique* (Paris: Le Léopard d'or, 2002), 136. We only quote Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens) in his Exhortation to the Heathen (Chapter XII. — Exhortation to Abandon Their Old Errors and Listen to the Instructions of Christ): "Let us then avoid custom as we would a dangerous headland, or the threatening Charybdis, or the mythic sirens. It chokes man, turns him away from truth, leads him away from life: custom is a snare, a gulf, a pit, a mischievous winnowing fan. Urge the ship beyond that smoke and billow. Let us shun, fellow-mariners, let us shun this billow; it vomits forth fire: it is a wicked island, heaped with bones and corpses, and in it sings a fair courtesan, Pleasure, delighting with music for the common ear . . . She praises thee, O mariner, and calls the illustrious; and the courtesan tries to win to herself the glory of the Greeks. Leave her to prey on the dead; a heavenly spirit comes to thy help: pass by Pleasure, she beguiles. Let not a woman with flowing train cheat you of your senses, with her flattering prattle seeking your hurt. Sail past the song; it works death; exert your will, and you have overcome ruin; bound to the wood of the Cross, you shall be freed from destruction. The Word of God will be your pilot, and the Holy Spirit will bring you to anchor in the haven of Heaven."

<sup>41</sup> May Viellard-Troïekourov, "Sirènes, poissons carolingiens," *Cahiers archéologiques* 19 (Paris: Ed. Klincksieck, 1969), 61–82. And in the beginning of the eighteenth century, we can find in the book, *De Monstris* (or *Liber monstorum*) thought to be by the English monk Aldhelm of Malmesbury (636–707), a description of a siren with a fishtail: "Les sirènes sont des filles de la mer qui séduisent les marins avec leurs jolis corps et leurs douces voix. De la tête au nombril, leur corps est celui d'une vierge et ressemble beaucoup à un être humain mais elles ont une queue de poisson couverte d'écailles grâce à laquelle elles se dissimulent dans les flots." [Sirens are girls of the sea who allured the sailors by the beauty of their body and their charming voices. From the head to the navel, their body looks like the body of a virgin and resembles a human being, but they have a tail of fish covered with scales allowing her to hide in the waves.]. The monk is one of the first

Symbolizing vanity, lust, sexual display and seduction, mermaids lead to damnation. So mermaids are also a female version of the devil, sometimes associated with the Aquarius zodiacsign. She enchants men with her song, drawing them into a deep sleep to kill them. The parabola is obvious: don't let yourself be diverted from your way by luxury, glory, and pleasures (mermaids). If you do so you will head straight toward death (the devil). Mermaids are often considered fantastic animals, hybrids, as described by Bestiaries,<sup>42</sup> but they are also the image of the carnal women of the twelfth century, viewed negatively in the artist's eye. Some sirens have real female attributes. Small breasts were often represented by artists probably inspired by female models, providing us with an idea of the real nudity of their time.

In the thirteenth century, the woman appears more and more often "portrayed for what she is in the society,"<sup>43</sup> but mermaids keep on decorating corbels and still reflect the idea of nudity. In the Midi, she can still be found in many Gothic monuments: the Gâche tower in the Palais des Papes in Avignon, churches of Montmaur (Aude), Rieux-Minervois or cloître d'Elne.<sup>44</sup> But she disappears on the outside of the monuments in the Midi (all examples mentioned are inside); even in the corbel series in Mirepoix the mermaid is missing.

At the end of the fourteenth century, mermaids represent Mélusine, a fairy figure (feminine spirit of fresh waters in holy springs and rivers) created by Jehan d'Arras (between 1387 and 1392). But this legend has been completely ignored on the corbels of this region.

Claude Gaignebet and J.Dominique Lajoux report that the figuration of the mermaid with her tail vertically raised underlines her genitals. So the mermaid may symbolize prostitution as well as bestiality<sup>45</sup> and personifies the image of temptation. Her nudity leads to a distraction from the spiritual path. In the Midi, sirens on corbels are once again very isolated cases and in the heart of the region, sirens have bird-like bodies (inspired by models from antiquity).

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to stress the visual aspect of the seduction that sirens bring about.

<sup>42</sup> Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx, *La sirène dans la pensée et dans l'art de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Age. Du mythe païen au symbole chrétien* (Bruxelles: Académie royale de Belgique, Publications de la Classe des Beaux-Arts de l'Académie Royale de Belgique, 1997/1998). See also Edmond Faral, "La queue de poisson des Sirènes," *Romania* 74 (1953): 433–506.

<sup>43</sup> Another allegory of the lust appears on a gothic corbel of the cloister of Saint-Nazaire de Béziers: "la femme aux serpents". This iconography is completely absent from Romanesque corbels.

<sup>44</sup> Marie-Luce Fabrié, "Images de la femme dans les consoles sculptées de la fin du gothique en Languedoc oriental," *La femme dans l'histoire et la société méridionales*. 66e congrès de la Fédération historique Languedoc-Roussillon, Narbonne 1994 (Montpellier: Fédération Historique Languedoc-Roussillon, 1995), 243–54.

<sup>45</sup> See Claude Gaignebet and J.Dominique Lajoux, *Art profane et religion populaire*, 143.

## Woman's Bust Revealing a Naked Breast

Besides the figuration of sirens, the woman or the female head never appears on the Romanesque corbels in the Midi, except on one corbel of the famous door called "Miègeville" of Saint-Sernin de Toulouse. It shows a small female bust and is a demonstration of how well the "corbel artist" could represent women, with dexterity and charm (Fig. 20). In her oval face, circled eyes are perforated. A realistic nose, slightly prominent, tops the nice mouth half-open and the round chin. This woman wears a necklace, and under the necklace a convex excrescence reveals the naked right breast. The long veil perfectly fits the shape of the face. The head is slightly turned to the left, making the veil pleat in several places. The first pleat forms an S at the level of the breast. The others fold at shoulder length. From the shoulder on, the veil is smooth, then again three pleats appear and wrap in the elbow and the right forearm. The left hand catches the first pleat, just above the right hand. The result is harmonious, gentle, curved. The veil covers her long hair; two locks at the level of the forehead design a kind of arabesque fringe. The ends of the locks are used as two pins to hold back the hair and the veil. The interpretations of this head are controversial due to the gesture of the right hand that seems to be catching, picking up a small round object, maybe a pearl, attached to the necklace (Fig. 21). This bust with no equivalent on other corbels is a masterpiece with its perfect balance, its curved lines and its iconography, a woman showing her nudity with elegance and prudence.

In the thirteenth century, the Virgin Mary could appear as a realistic vision of a contemporary woman. In the twelfth century, the Virgin Mary still wears a veil and/or is "crowned in glory,"<sup>46</sup> so, the spectator can distinguish her from the woman-sinner represented with long flowing hair. Is the representation of a veiled woman sufficient to evoke the representation of Mary? If this is the case, the corbel of the door of Miègeville, Saint-Sernin de Toulouse, represents Mary (despite the absence of the glory).<sup>47</sup> Besides Mary, other characters may wear veils. On the upper corbel supporting the lintel of the Miègeville door, two veiled women appear seated on a lion. Between the two women appears a male character. He puts his hands on the women's heads and brings them closer. The veils of the

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the veiled Virgin from the tympanum of the twelfth-century west portal, called Puerta Speciosa, of the Monastery of San Salvador of Leyre.

<sup>47</sup> In the Midi, the head sculpted on a corbel of the west door of the Romanesque church in Boulou (Roussillon) was interpreted by Olivier Poisson as a figuration of the Virgin. See Jean Pérouse de Montclos, *Le guide du Patrimoine: Languedoc, Roussillon* (Paris: Hachette et Ministère de la Culture, 1996), 175, and André Bonery, Marco Burrini, Jordi Camps i Soria, Immaculata Lorés i Otzet, Géraldine Mallet, Olivier Poisson, *Le Maître de Cabestany* (La Pierre Qui Vire: Zodiaque 2000), 99. The corbel of the second half of the twelfth century would be a very early representation of the Virgin on corbels.



women are disorderly, different from the veil of the woman on the corbel of the cornice. Marcel Durliat has interpreted the two women on the lion as a representation of "nicolaïsme," carnal laxness, the lion symbolizing "concupiscence of the flesh (chair)."<sup>48</sup>

A bas-relief preserved in the Augustins museum of Toulouse seems more revealing: two women entirely represented in a cross-legged position hold animals in their arms. The right woman holds a lamb and the left one a lion. Inscriptions surround the carved characters: "SIGNUM LEONIS / SIGNUM ARIETIS / HOC FUIT FACTUM T TEMPORE IULII CESARIS" (sign of the lion, sign of the ram, this was made in the time of Jules Caesar).<sup>49</sup> Marcel Durliat reports the legend originally related by Nicolas Bertrand, lawyer of the parliament of Toulouse, in the sixteenth century: "In the time of Jules Caesar, two virgins would have given birth, one to a lion, one to a lamb, two prefigurations of Jesus Christ, who the day of the judgment will appear as a lamb for the just and as a lion for the unjust." This legend is called into question by the authors of the *Corpus of inscriptions*.<sup>50</sup> The hypothesis of Jean Soubiran gives a zodiacal sense to these women presenting symbols of power. The aries/ram is the first sign of the zodiac and the sign of the lion corresponds to the warmer months. Let's note that the woman holding the lion wears the same veil as the woman on the corbel of the cornice, which gives a new possibility of interpretation: a personification of the sign of the zodiac "lion" or according to the legend of Nicolas Bertrand: a representation of a virgin giving birth to the lion, a symbol of Jesus Christ.

Claudio Lange has interpreted this woman and adjacent iconography (a version of Luna) as two prostitutes, as Houris, hūr or hūrīyah, Muslim maidens of Paradise, described in the Qur'an as "pure beings" or "companions pure" of paradise. But how can his interpretation of naked characters showing a kind of propaganda against Islam on churches find any evidentiary and conclusive support? Furthermore, the image of "Luna" appears in the same way on a misericord in Saint-Cloud/Jura where the character is represented alone and not in connection with a veiled woman! Thus the corbels show an independent iconography.

The woman of Toulouse unveiling her naked breast has no regional equivalent. It might have been inspired by antique sculptures, similar to a terracotta figurine

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<sup>48</sup> Marcel Durliat, *La Sculpture romane de la route de Saint-Jacques: De Conques à Compostelle*. 2nd ed. (1990; Mont-de-Marsan: Comité d'études sur l'histoire et l'art de Gascogne, 1995), 409.

<sup>49</sup> Marcel Durliat, *La Sculpture romane de la route de Saint-Jacques*, 414.

<sup>50</sup> *Corpus des inscriptions de la France Médiévale* 7, Ville de Toulouse, textes établis et présenté par Robert Favreau, Jean Michaud, et Bernadette Leplant (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982), 62.

from Beotia (390 B.C.E.) preserved in the British Museum in London (Fig. 22).<sup>51</sup> This bust shows a female-like figure, wearing a veil and a kind of hat (toque). The veil falls along the shoulder down to the elbows, the left hand grabs the veil while the right hand, in a position similar to the hand of the female bust on the Miègeville door, grabs an egg between the naked breasts. No doubt, here we have a representation of Dionysos! There are other examples of possible antique models for this female bust which do not represent Dionysos, but various antique characters on funeral steles (Fig. 23). In the Midi, this exceptional bust of the Miègeville door could be explained to be a copy of an antique sculpture, so there is no clear intention to give a negative image of the breast, neither of sinful nudity or sexuality nor of prostitution.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless this beautiful sculpture remains a representation with an erotic connotation,<sup>53</sup> because the breast does not lie flat as in the Romanesque women sinner representations.<sup>54</sup>

Woman has traditionally been associated with the image of sin for a long time because of her allegedly weak nature. In the twelfth century, snakes have commonly a female head and female chest.<sup>55</sup> The corbels worked out in the thirteenth century show another image of woman. They depict now a “really normal” woman, in accordance with the literary trends of the thirteenth century giving concrete descriptions of characters (Jean Renart, for instance, quotes historical characters). Metaphors are created to show the denunciation of really existing problems encountered in the society of the middle class and of the feudal and aristocratic society (*Reynard the Fox*). The secular literature, as do the Biblical stories, has an influence on carvings. In this kind of literature, the realistic woman

<sup>51</sup> Terracotta protome of Dionysos, GR 1874.3–5.71 (Terracotta 874) preserved in the Room 19: Greece: Athens.

<sup>52</sup> I cannot agree with Claudio Lange when he suggests that the corbel from the Miegerville Door depicts the image of a Hourai, since not all of the antique images, similar to the veiled woman of Toulouse, represent Dionysos. If that had been the case, we could have supported his hypothesis because Maenads, female worshippers, are often represented next to Dionysos on Greek pottery. They are described as wild, insane, ecstatic women who could not be reasoned with. Their representation is similar to the representation of courtesans of the cult of Aphrodite, practising the ritual prostitution in shrines and temples of the goddess of beauty, love and procreation.

<sup>53</sup> Later on, in the fifteenth century, this erotic connotation is found in nursing Madonna representations. One of the greatest is The Virgin of Melun (or Madonna and Child) of Jean Fouquet. Marilyn Yalom, *A History of the Breast* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 49–90, gives some examples of erotic breast in late-medieval and Renaissance art.

<sup>54</sup> An excellent illustration for “hanging breast” can be found in the representation of hell on the Romanesque tympanum of Conques.

<sup>55</sup> The snake appearing on a corbel of the apse of the ancient chartreuse Notre-Dame in Hastings-Arthous (Landes) has precisely a female head and long open hair (see illustration by Horvat and Pastoureau, *Figures romanes*, 96. The snake takes part in an arrangement of corbels illustrating the original sin.

appears more frequently. The appearance of mere female heads or women dressed in “medieval fashion” on corbels and Gothic brackets demonstrate the new realism reflecting women now having a proper role in medieval society, while in the Romanesque society they did not. But if in the twelfth century woman incarnates the image of a sinner, why can we not see her more often on corbels? These carved images, repeatedly interpreted as a representation of sin, may grant her a place of choice! Was the image of a realistic woman not clear enough to evoke sin? Could it only be enforced by the image of a mermaid? We can deduce that the merely real woman or her head, almost absent from the Romanesque iconography on corbels, does not project a negative didactic or moral image, unless she is part of a narrative context.

The tympanum of Conques shows a couple suffering the tortures of Hell. The woman wears a rope around her neck. She is naked down to the waist and exhibits her breast. Her legs are hidden behind a cloth and she has long hair with a middle parting. Another example comes from a capital of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire in Fleury. The devil presents a woman to Saint Benoît, to tempt him. The woman’s face, represented in profile, seems quite realistic with her long hair parted in the middle covering her shoulders. She wears a striped cloth on the chest<sup>56</sup> and a long pleated skirt. In both examples, the woman is not a mermaid and is shown, taken out of the narrative context, as a real woman.<sup>57</sup>

If the real woman appears in the image of a couple or figures like Salomé,<sup>58</sup> Eve<sup>59</sup> or Mary,<sup>60</sup> her representation takes place in a “mise en scène,” an iconographic ensemble. The woman rarely appears for herself. The available space on a corbel does not allow the whole representation of a woman and the mere head is not sufficient to evoke sin. Consequently, the “imagier” (creator of the image) makes use of the mermaid, who speaks her own language, symbolizing the woman sinner.

We noted that the mermaid and the other women in sinner scenes presented long untied hair. The appearance of clothing details in the thirteenth century (often absent in the twelfth century) allows the sculptors to show the real woman with

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<sup>56</sup> According to Michel Pastoureau, stripes are the sign of marginal people in a society (see *Figures romanes*, 266–67). there are always 2 authors, please distinguish or mention both each time: Der Text wurde von Michel Pastoureau geschrieben, die Illustrations/Fotos sind von Frank Horvat.

<sup>57</sup> See also Patricia M. Gathercole, *The Depiction of Women in Medieval French Manuscript Illumination*. Studies in French Civilization, 17 (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter : The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> The capital, showing Salome dancing nude in front of Herod, preserved in the Augustins museum of Toulouse, was originally situated in the cloister of the cathedral Saint-Etienne of Toulouse.

<sup>59</sup> On the lintel of Autun.

<sup>60</sup> In the Biblical scenes: Worship of the Magi (capital, deposited in the room from the chapter house of Autun), the Assumption (tympanum sculpted by the “maître de Cabestany”), the Escape in Egypt (capital from Saint-Lazare d’Autun).

her headdress and by doing so, clearly to distinguish her from the symbolic woman sinner.

## Female Exhibitionists

Special attention must be paid to another striking example, Notre Dame de Malpas in Montfrin near Avignon. Some corbels of the cornice of the west front wall show an unusual obscene iconography. These corbels depict a crouched person with a very big head (Fig. 23–25). The character has detailed locks of hair and fleshy lips. Its long-limbed arms form small bows, its hands catch the little feet. Between the arms and the feet, the figure has a naked chest and a huge oval hole bordered by two excrescences of a vulva.

The corbel of Montfrin shows the so called Sheela-na-gig,<sup>61</sup> often interpreted as ancient goddesses, the Celtic image of the Mother Earth, later on as a Christian warning against lust, often depicted on Irish or British monuments as mentioned above. This kind of representation appears very often in the west of France, in the north of Spain, and in Ireland, in England (especially in the south), Scotland or Wales,<sup>62</sup> but never in the south of France except in Montfrin. Montfrin seems to be the most southern representation of this subject. One of the characteristics of the sheelas in Montfrin is their huge heads.<sup>63</sup> According to the studies of Christian

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<sup>61</sup> Barbara Freitag did an excellent analysis of the origin of this “type name” in her book: *Sheela-Na-Gig: Unravelling an Enigma* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 52–67. Other studies have been done by Miriam Robbins Dexter and Starr Goode, “The Sheela na gigs, Sexuality, and the Goddess in Ancient Ireland,” *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 4, 2 (2002): 50–75. Marian Bleeker, “Situating Sheela-na-gigs: The Female Body and Social Significance in Romanesque Sculpture,” PhD, University of Chicago, 2001; Marian Bleeker, “Sheelas, Sex, and Significance in Romanesque Sculpture: The Kilpeck Corbel Series,” *Studies in Iconography* 26 (2005): 1–26.

<sup>62</sup> According to the studies of Anthony Weir and James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London: R. T. Batsford, 1996). The authors quote the following churches: Essex, Kilpek, Fromistà, Champagnolles, Marignac. See also, for example, Jørgen Andersen, *The Witch on the Wall: Medieval Erotic Sculpture of the British Isles* (Copenhagen and London: George Allen & Unwin), 1977, 52, and Giannerini, *Amour et érotisme dans la sculpture romane*, 38. And for French sculptures, see Christian Bougoux, *Petite grammaire de l’obscène, églises du duché d’Aquitaine*, 87–111. Consult also a very instructive internet sites for Ireland with many examples: <http://www.irelands-sheelanagigs.org/index.php?id=56> (last accessed on March 31, 2008) and the “non-academic” book by Jack Roberts and Joanne McMahon, *The Divine Hag of the Christian Celts, An Illustrated Guide to the Sheela-na-Gigs of Britain and Ireland* (Cork and Dublin: The Mercier Press, 2000).

<sup>63</sup> Only one comparable figurine has been found. A character similar in its obscene position decorates the plank of the “maison romane” in Nîmes (Fig. 26). This character has a round head with the eyes popping out and a stretched closed mouth. Its hands rest on the thighs and its curvy legs are largely stretched apart. This spacing reveals the genitals, a belly and its navel. Snake-like stems emerge from the ears and encircle the character. This figurine and the corbels from

Bougoux,<sup>64</sup> the personage of Montrin is figured in the “shameless arch position,”<sup>65</sup> differing from the “natural crouching” and the “gestual” (hands directly gripping the genital) positions.

Anthony Weir and James Jerman compare these representations to the positions of bifid sirens or to the “maskmouth-puller,” in which the stretching of the mouth reminds of the spread-out genitals of the Sheelas.<sup>66</sup> According to Horst Bredekamp, the prototype of this iconography comes from San Martín de Frómista.<sup>67</sup> He quotes a passage of Jørgen Andersen about the founder of the Kilpek church, who has drawn his inspiration from Frómista during his travels on the pilgrimage road of Compostelle. The same could explain the presence of the sheela in Montfrin, near Saint-Gilles and so not far away from the pilgrimage road of Saint-Jacques. Moreover, Horst Bredekamp notices that these figures often appear on “prominenten Orten der Architektur(Westgiebel);”<sup>68</sup> this is the case of the corbel on the western front of Montfrin. These representations could also be placed just above the door<sup>69</sup> or on the pediment of the western front accommodating the doors, as in Montfrin. The open vulva recalls the opening of the monument. So the vulva could also symbolize the mystery of the origins of life, birth, the passage from which everybody comes and to which everybody turns again. Sheelas on corbels situated above a door probably depict a reproductive function of the female sex. Above the entrance, these female exhibitionists acquire also an apotropaic function.<sup>70</sup>

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Montfrin, close to Nîmes, may share a common unknown iconographical source.

<sup>64</sup> He has not mentioned the corbel of Montfrin at all.

<sup>65</sup> Christian Bougoux, *Petite grammaire de l'obscène*, 89 and 98–100.

<sup>66</sup> Weir and Jerman, *Images of Lust*, 104.

<sup>67</sup> Bredekamp, “Wallfahrt als Versuchung,” 236.

<sup>68</sup> Bredekamp, “Wallfahrt als Versuchung,” 234: The author sees in this situation a “Verdammung (condamnation) des ‘‘digitus infamis’’ and a “Verfluchung (excommunication/damnation) der weiblichen Scham (female shame).”

<sup>69</sup> This seems to be the case of the churches Stretton, Tugford, Holdgate, where we can find probable re-employment of ancient carved pieces showing a Sheela-na-Gig.

<sup>70</sup> Miriam Robbins Dexter and Victor H. Mair, “Apotropaia and Fecundity in Eurasian Myth and Iconography: Erotic Female Display Figures,” *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference*, 2004, ed. Karlene Jones-Bley, Angela della Volpe, Martin Huld, and Miriam Robbins Dexter. *Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph No. 50* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Man., 2005), 97–121. “A remarkable parallel to the Celtic Sheelagh-na-gig is found in the Palauan archipelago. The wooden figure of a nude woman, prominently exposing her vulva by sitting with legs wide apart and extended to either side of the body, is placed on the eastern gable of each village’s chief meeting house. Such figures are called dilugai. Interestingly, the yoni [the female genitalia] is in the shape of a cleft downward-pointing triangle. These female figures protect the villagers’ health and ward off all evil spirits as well. They are constructed by ritual specialists according to strict rules, which if broken would result in the specialist’s as well as the chief’s death. It is not coincidental that all examples of signs representing the female genitalia used as apotropaic devices are found on gates. The vulva is the primordial gate, the mysterious divide

If the image of Mother Earth, image par excellence of ancient female fertility, can be found in different civilizations and different ages, these images, when juxtaposed with other obscene iconography, could also personify an image of lust, and so can be compared to mermaids.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless we have no juxtaposition of this kind on the corbels of Montfrin, nor in the Midi. Similarity of distant corbels as those of Kilpek and Montfrin, shows the incredible circulation of images in medieval Europe, and not only along the pilgrimage roads of Saint-Jacques. If some sculptors had exceptional memory, others most certainly had a sketchbook to keep trace of the subjects observed on distant churches.

The frequent repetition of some subjects may suggest a sort of iconographic code, but we have not found a definitive interpretation yet. Neither can we give a unique reason why, amazingly, this iconography has transferred to the south of France. In Montfrin, the most acceptable interpretation seems to be that the Sheela is an apotropaic image and illustrates the idea of a passage or of birth. So could we not transfer this basic idea to the bottom corbel of Chambonas? The bottoms located in the center of the apse could also be intended to ward off evil and to symbolize a passage: The passage from darkness to light, the opposition of darkness and light, perhaps also the passage to the hereafter, from birth to death. Therefore, these images are not at all erotic images.

In the Midi, nudity has obviously not been represented only to lecture about sins or stigmatize enemies as has been established by art historians writing about Aquitaine and Spain. A different iconography may illustrate a diverging point of view in the messages generally contained in sermons addressing sex and gender. Historical considerations may explain this discrepancy. For instance, the Midi, by remaining separated from the kingdom of France for a long time, may have developed its own style and iconography. But other factors have to be taken into account, such as the sources from which each regional iconography derives.

We must evoke the possible influence of written sources, such as the *Codex Calixtinus* (or *Liber Sancti Jacobi*) written in the twelfth century. Different anterior texts (as *Martyre de saint Jacques* or *Livre des Miracles*) written before 1158–1159 led to a final version of the *Codex*, a kind of compilation appearing between 1160–1164. The finest example of the *Codex Calixtinus*<sup>72</sup> is preserved in the archives of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The compilation consists of five books of

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between nonlife and life", in Mercia Eliade, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, article "Yoni," Vol.15 (Chicago: Macmillan Publishing Company for the University of Chicago, 1993), 534.

<sup>71</sup> Jacqueline Leclercq-Kadaner-Marx, "De la Terre-Mère à la Luxure. A propos de la migration des symboles," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 18, 1 (1975): 37–43.

<sup>72</sup> *Codex Calixtinus* according to the first attribution to Calixte II (pope from 1119 to 1124).

different origins and dates.<sup>73</sup> The Livre IV of Saint-James apostle<sup>74</sup> is a “Guide for Pilgrims” (*Iter pro peregrinis ad Compostellam*) composed of eleven chapters. It is written in Latin, primarily for the benefit of French pilgrims.<sup>75</sup> The guide provides important pieces of information such as the description of the pilgrims’ roads and the cities crossed. The text also details the customs of the rural people inhabiting these regions. The first version of this description can be found in the *Les vingt-deux miracles de saint Jacques*, dated from 1132–1135, composed by Aimeric Picaud, cleric from Parthenay-le-Vieux in Poitou, who may have travelled himself to Compostella.

The guide is contemporary with the construction of most Romanesque churches. The very interesting chapter VII, entitled: “De nominibus terrarum et qualitatibus gentium, quae in itinere sancti Jacobi habentur”<sup>76</sup> (About names of the regions and characteristics of the populations on the road of Saint-Jacob), describes “Pictavorum, Sanctonensium, terra Gasconica, terra Aragoni, Basclorum and Navarrorum.” Following successively the Way of St James, *Via Tolosane* and passing by Toulouse, the author crosses the Garonne River to enter in the Gascon country and further into the southwest of France and the North of Spain.

For these regions where so many corbels depict obscene iconographies as mentioned in the beginning of our article, the Guide reports:

In beati Jacobi viatico, via scilicet Tolosana, primitus, transito flumine Garona, invenitur tellus Gasconica . . . . Gasconi sunt levilogi, verbosi, derisores, libidinosi, ebriosi, cibis prodigi, male induti, pannis et gazis devastati; bellis tamen assueti, sed hospitalitate pauperum praecipui . . . . Suppositis paucis paleis, in putredine scilicet, familia cum domino et domina, omnes una recumbunt. . . . Inde circa portus Cisereos habetir tellus Basclorum ( . . . ). Ipsi sunt feroces; et terra, in quam commorantur, ferox et silvestris et barbara habetur. Ferocitas vultuum, similitudinesque linguae barbarae eorum, corda videntium illos expavescit . . . . Post hanc vallem invenitu tellus Navarrorum . . . . Hi vero trupiter vestiuntur et turpiter comedunt et bibunt: omnis namque familia domus Navarri, tam servus quam dominus, tam ancilla quam domina, omnia pulmentaria simul mixta in uno catino, non cum cochleariis, sed manibus propriis, solet comedere, et cum uno scypho bibere. Si illos comedere videres, canibus edentibus vel porcis eos computares; . . . . Haec est gens barbara, omnibus gentibus

<sup>73</sup> PaulaGerson, “Le guide du pèlerin de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle – Auteurs, Intentions, Contextes,” *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa* XXXI (2000): 5–16.

<sup>74</sup> It’s the fifth book in the Codex version.

<sup>75</sup> Jeanne Viellard, *Le Guide du pèlerin de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle*, édité et traduit en français d’après les manuscrits de Compostelle et de Ripoll (1938; Paris: Jules Vrin, 1984), 17–19.

<sup>76</sup> Fidel Fita and Julien Vinson, *Le codex de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle (Liber de miraculis S. Jacobi). Livre IV* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1882), 11. See Bernard Gicquel, *La légende de Compostelle – Le livre de saint Jacques* (Paris: Tallandier, 2003), 604–08. See also Klaus Herbers and Manuel Santos Noia, *Liber Sancti Jacobi Codex Calixtinus* (Santiago de Compostela/Coruña: ed.Xunta de Galicia, 1987–1998).

dissimilis ritibus et essentia, malitia plena, colore atra, visu iniqua, prava, perversa, perfida, fide vacua et corrupta, libidinosa, ebriosa, omni violentia docta, ferox et sylvestris, improba et reproba, impia et austera, dira et contentiosa, ullis bonis inculta, cunctis vitiis et iniquitatibus edocta, getis et Sarracenis consimilis, malitia nostrae genti Gallicae in omnibus inimica; pro uno nummo tantum, perimit Navarrus aut Baclus, si potest, Gallicum.<sup>77</sup>

[On the road of Saint-Jacques from Toulouse, we first pass the Garonne before discovering the pays gascon . . . The Gascons are light in their speeches, loquacious, mocking, licentious, hearty eaters and strong drinkers, dressed in tatters and impecunious, scrappers, but hospitable towards the poor . . . They do not feel reluctant to scatter small litters of rotten straw to sleep there all together without distinction, servants with the master and the mistress . . . near the "ports de Cize," we find "le Pays des Basques" . . . They are wild and the ground on which they live is also wild, forester and barbarian; the ferocity of their face and the same the cruelty of their language, terrify the hearts of those who see them . . . They are dressed shamefully and eat and drink badly. Indeed, all the family of a "Navarrais," as well servant as master, as well maidservant as mistress, are used to eat all food mixed in only one pot, not with spoons, but with the hands, and they drink of the same bowl. If you saw them eating, you would believe to see bingeing dogs or pigs. If you heard them speak; they are barkings of dog which one would believe to hear . . . Indeed, they have a completely barbarian language . . . These people are barbarian people, different from all the other races by their habits and their essence, deprived of all malice, of dark skin tint; ugly to see, depraved, perverse, perfidious, disloyal and corrupted, libidinous, addicted to drink, knowing all kinds of violence, wild and uncontrolled, badly honest and fallacious, impious and rough, cruel and quarrelsome, ignorant of all that is good, knowing all kind of vices and iniquities. They are similar in malice to Gêtes and Sarrasins, enemy in all of our people of France. For only one denier, the Basque or the Navarrais will kill, if he can, a Frenchman]

The chapter underlines vices and faults and dismisses the population's manners, relating that people have or are exhibiting lustful desires to eat and sleep together.

These descriptions are transferable to the figures on corbels in these regions: couples having intercourse, figures drinking and eating, and ugly heads.

Another passage extensively describes how people lift up their clothes to exhibit their genitals, as pictured also on the corbels:

In quibusdam oris eorumdem, in Biscagia scilicet et Alava, dum Navarri se calefaciunt, vir mulieri et mulier viro verenda sua ostendunt.<sup>78</sup>

[In some areas, so be it in Biscaye and in Alava, when the Navarrais warm up, the man shows to the woman, and the woman to the man, their shameful parts.]

<sup>77</sup> Fidel Fita and Julien Vinson, *Le codex de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle*, 13, 16–8.

<sup>78</sup> Fita and Vinson, *Le codex de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle*, 18.



Navrri etiam utuntur fornicatione incesta pecudibus; seram enim Navarrus ad mulae suae et equae posteriora suspendere dicitur ne alius accedat, sed ipse; vulvae etiam mulieris et mulae basia praebet libidinosa.

[Navarrais have use of incestuous fornication with their livestock; it is said indeed that the Navarrais hangs on the posterior of his mule and his mare a lock, so that no one else can get in. The vulva of the woman and the mule offers lewd kisses]

In the earlier version of the chapter, a description of another corbel iconography can be found:

In terra etiam Basclorum, via sancti Jacobi est excellentissimus mons, quod dicitur Portus Ciseræ, aut quia porta Hispaniae ibi habetur, aut quia per illum montem res necessariae de alia terra ad aliam transportantur . . . . In summitate vero eiusdem montis est locus, quod dicitur *Crux Caroli* . . . . unde primus locus orationis sancti Jacobi ibi habetur. In eodem monte, antequam christianitas in oris Hispanicis ad plenum augmentaretur, Navarri impii et Bascli peregrinos ad sanctum Jacobum pergentes non solum deprædari, verum etiam ut asinos equitare et perimere solebant.

[After having crossed this country, we discover Gascony and Pays Basque where, on the road of Saint-Jacques, is a mountain pass called port de Cize, remarkable either because it is the door of Spain, or because it is used for transport from one country to another... The summit is named Croix de Charles . . . it is the first station of prayer of Saint-Jacques. Before Christianity had been established completely until the borders of Spain, the impious Navarrais and the Basques were not satisfied to rob the pilgrims on the road to Saint-Jacques, they rode them as if they were asses to make them perish then]

Figures riding other figures or animals are frequently represented on corbels in the southwest of France and in Northern Spain.

Finally this chapter also suggests a link between these regions and Ireland:

Navarri et Bascli unius similitudinis et qualitatis, in cibis scilicet et vestibus et lingua habentur; sed Bascli facie candidiores Navarris approbantur. Navarri pannis nigris et curtis usque ad genua tantummodo, Scothorum more, induuntur et sotularibus, quos lavarcas vocant, de piloso corio scilicet non confecto factas.<sup>80</sup>

[The Navarreses and the Basques dress in the same way, have the same food and speak the same language, but the Basques are paler of face than the Navarreses. The Navarreses carry black and short tunics knee-high, in the style of the Irishmen]

<sup>79</sup> Fita and Vinson, *Le codex de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle*, 14–5.

<sup>80</sup> Fita and Vinson, *Le codex de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle*, 16.

or

Tradi solet illos ex genere Scothorum descendisse, pro eo quod similies illis sunt moribus et similitudine. Julius Caesar, ut fertur, tres gentes, Nubianos scilicet, Scothos et Cornubianos caudatos, ad expugnandum hispanorum populos, eo quod tributum ei reddere nolebant, ad Hispaniam misit, praeciens eis ut omnem sexum masculinum galdio interficerent femineumque tantum ad vitian reservarent.<sup>81</sup>

[Tradition has it that these people are descendants from the ethnos group of the Irishmen which they resemble by their habits and their aspect. Jules Caesar is supposed to have sent to Spain three peoples, the Nubians, the Irishmen (or Scottish scoti) and coués (caudati) of Cornwall, to fight the Spaniards, who refused to pay him a tribute; he ordered them to kill all the males with their sword, but to let the women live. The children that they made them were called later Navarrese.]

This link to the British Isles, especially Ireland, is more than fascinating. Here we have a connection established by a written source between two areas where we can find so many figures displaying their genitals. Could this passage explain the presence of the sheela on corbels from Ireland, Spain and Gascony?

The *Codex* provides descriptions of the manner of inhabitants that could have directly inspired the artists to sculpt a corresponding suggestive iconography on corbels of these regions. These representations are banned from the corbels of the Midi. There, no corbel sculpture clearly illustrates sexuality, no figures lifting up clothes, no couples in sexual activity, uncovered genitals. Only classical images of lust and the Last Judgment can be found on others supports in Toulouse and Conques, subjects justified by the theological education.

In the *Codex*, the comments in the chapter VIII about the roads and cities in the Midi are different. This passage insists on the descriptions of relics pilgrims should venerate, and of sanctuaries they should visit and never mentions in any way negative habits or vices of the inhabitants of these regions.<sup>82</sup>

There is a correspondence between the description written in the *Codex* and the images sculpted on the corbel of Northern Spain and Gascony. There is none for the Midi. Was that pure coincidence or is this an early manifestation of the power of the media?

The study on the corbels in their local context reveals that there is more than one possible way to read nudity. Corbels depicting coarse-looking figures may illustrate visions of "sexuality," "obscenity" and/or "nudity," but the erotic and

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<sup>81</sup> Fita and Vinson, *Le codex de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle*, 18.

<sup>82</sup> Bernard Gicquel, *La légende de Compostelle*, 609–13.

obscene interpretation of a character is fundamentally dependent on the place, the context, and time.

Each case has to be studied in its context, local, geographical, historical (political, religious, time of creation—few decades could change the interpretation of an iconography theme), and artistic (education, supervision of the sculptors/artists/masons). Depending on whether the image is located outside or inside the building, the nude subject seems more or less offensive, sexual or obscene. Corbels are mostly situated outside and both the modern and the ancient visitor immediately focus on these images. Moreover, when studying corbels, one should always keep in mind that a subject cannot be separated from the neighboring corbels. Corbels must be considered contextually, as their position is meaningful.

Some images have been dictated by clerics or by the private owners of chapels to illustrate sin, lust and the negative opinion of sexuality taught by the Catholic Church. In Aquitaine/Gascony and in Northern Spain, where so many churches are decorated with obscene corbels, there is no doubt that they have a moral purpose enforced by the repetition of the same image, a kind of education by recurrent effect. Clerics are male only and corbels reflect their biased discourse about women<sup>83</sup>. One can imagine that artists/masons sculpting corbels were kept more or less tightly under control depending on the region. Did stricter clerics in the Midi reject the idea of having sexual images on their churches?

Corbels often have ambiguous significations, as if probing the visitor's soul: what will one see in those images, the evil or the good vision of the iconography?<sup>84</sup> Are corbel figures displaying genitals as a condemnation of pleasures and vices? Yes, often, but not only. Later on, in the famous *Très Riches heures du Duc de Berry*, a medieval book of hours, this kind of image is integrated in a narrative scene. The illustration of the month February in the calendar section<sup>85</sup> shows a winter scene in a peasant village. In the background, people are cutting wood, or taking cattle to the market, while in the foreground one can look into a farm. Inside the farm, the inhabitants warm themselves up by the fire (Fig. 27). Clothes lifted up to their knees reveal their genitals with no sexual intention at all. Here we have an innocent image of life on a winter's day. The corbels presenting characters in a similar position may also illustrate the idea "of warming," already mentioned in

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<sup>83</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux.

<sup>84</sup> For the significance of innuendo, even in art works, see the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph, and for innuendo in music, see Julia Shinnick's contribution.

<sup>85</sup> Illustration painted probably not by the Limbourg brothers around 1412–1416, but later on between 1438 and 1441, by an anonymous author at the court of Charles VIIth.

a shameful way in the *Codex Calixtinus*. However, a simple gesture, such as a hand lifting up the robe on purpose may alter significantly the interpretation, making it an obscene gesture.

The corpus of the corbels in the Midi reveals also that some isolated cases cannot fit into the category of subjects condemning pleasures and vices. Iconography is sometimes inspired by the architectural role of the corbel, such as atlantes, but also acrobats including naked ones. In the Midi, corbels have an apotropaic function, rather than a moral function, especially when the “obscene” figure (bottom, sheela-na-gig) stands alone. The apotropaic function is obvious when images are located in the heights of the building, out of sight from the commoners. From up there, they could only be intended to frighten or ward off evil spirits. This apotropaic or even magical effect was enforced by a shocking, shameful gesture of the sculpted character. Couples in the Midi do not suggest any sexual activity; they sit side by side in perfect harmony (Fig. 28–29).

Finally, we cannot neglect the fundamental impact of an antique heritage (Fig. 30–31). All subjects, from anthropomorphized genitals to sexual act, may have been observed on antique or Celtic vestiges near Romanesque churches. Are they ancient reminiscences of fertility rites? The most daring example is the female bust from the Miègeville door of Saint-Sernin de Toulouse. Veil, position and gesture are clearly inspired by an antique iconography, the small breast adding only a slight erotic touch.

Corbels confirm once more that there is no single attitude toward sexuality. Their interpretation fluctuates between sexuality, nudity, and other interpretations, from apotropaic to even humorous. No matter what the message is, they offer a perfect support to communicate an ambivalent point of view, clerical or pagan, on medieval sexuality. Corbels are always publicly displayed, intended for the commoner, when images in books or texts were only intended for the elite of medieval society.



Fig. 1: Couple in position of intercourse



Fig. 2: Two couples from San Pedros de Cervatos, Cantabria



Fig. 3: Masturbating figure, St-Léonard de Noblat



Fig. 4: Masturbating figure, Champagnolles





Fig. 5: Figs. lifting up their clothes, San Pedro de Tejada, Burgos



Fig. 6: Couple from Santa Maria de Uncastillo



Fig. 7: Sinners in Hell, after entering the bouche d'enfer, Conques



Fig. 8: Couple of Kilpeck



Fig. 9: Acrobat, Notre-Dame du Lac du Thor



Fig. 10: Acrobat, Lespéron



Fig. 11: Acrobat, Albaret le Comtal



Fig. 12: Late Gothic acrobat from Mirepoix



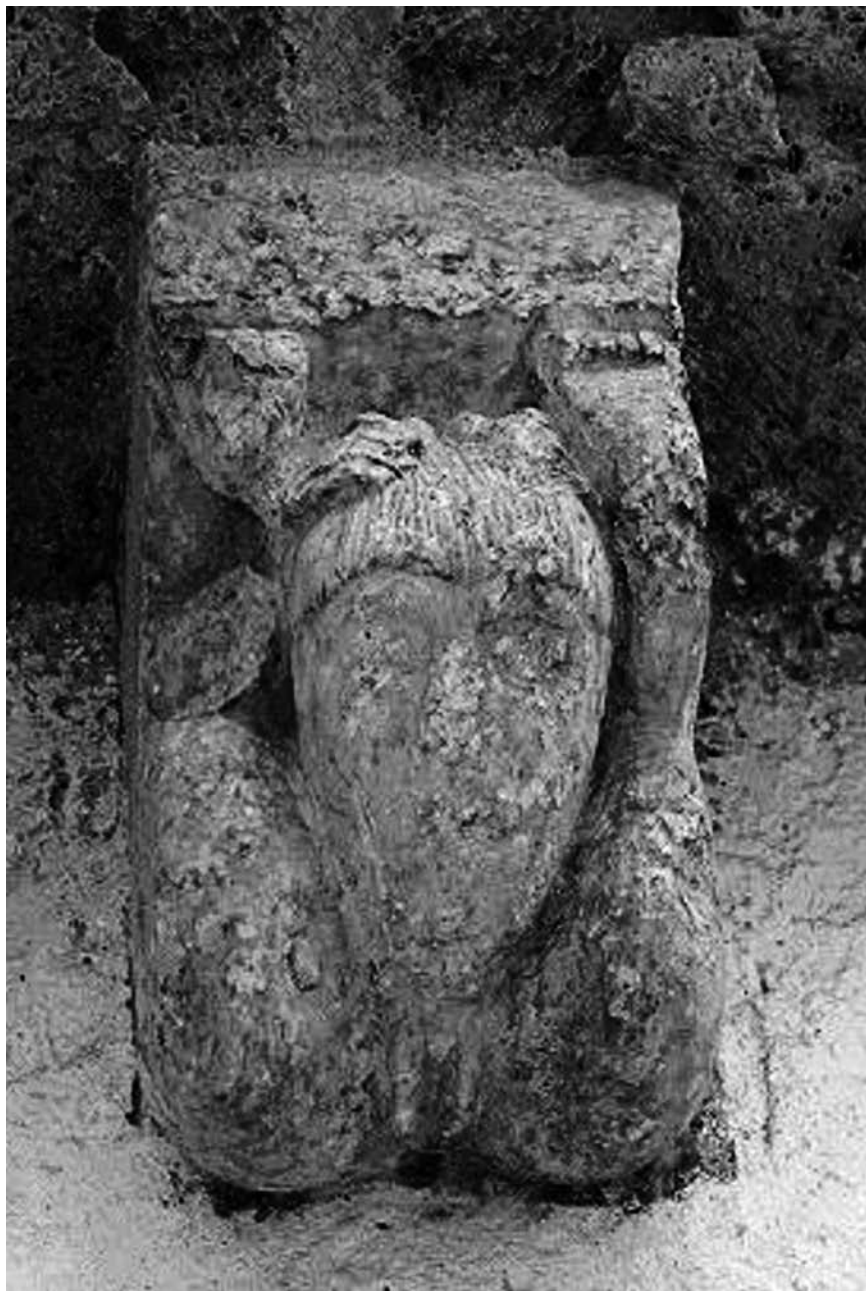


Fig. 13: Acrobat, Jouers



Fig. 14: Acrobat, Cahors



Fig. 15: Atlas inspired by ancient model, Saint-Gilles du Gard



Fig. 16: Corbels from Chambonas



Fig. 17: Diptych from the Wittert's Collection, Liège

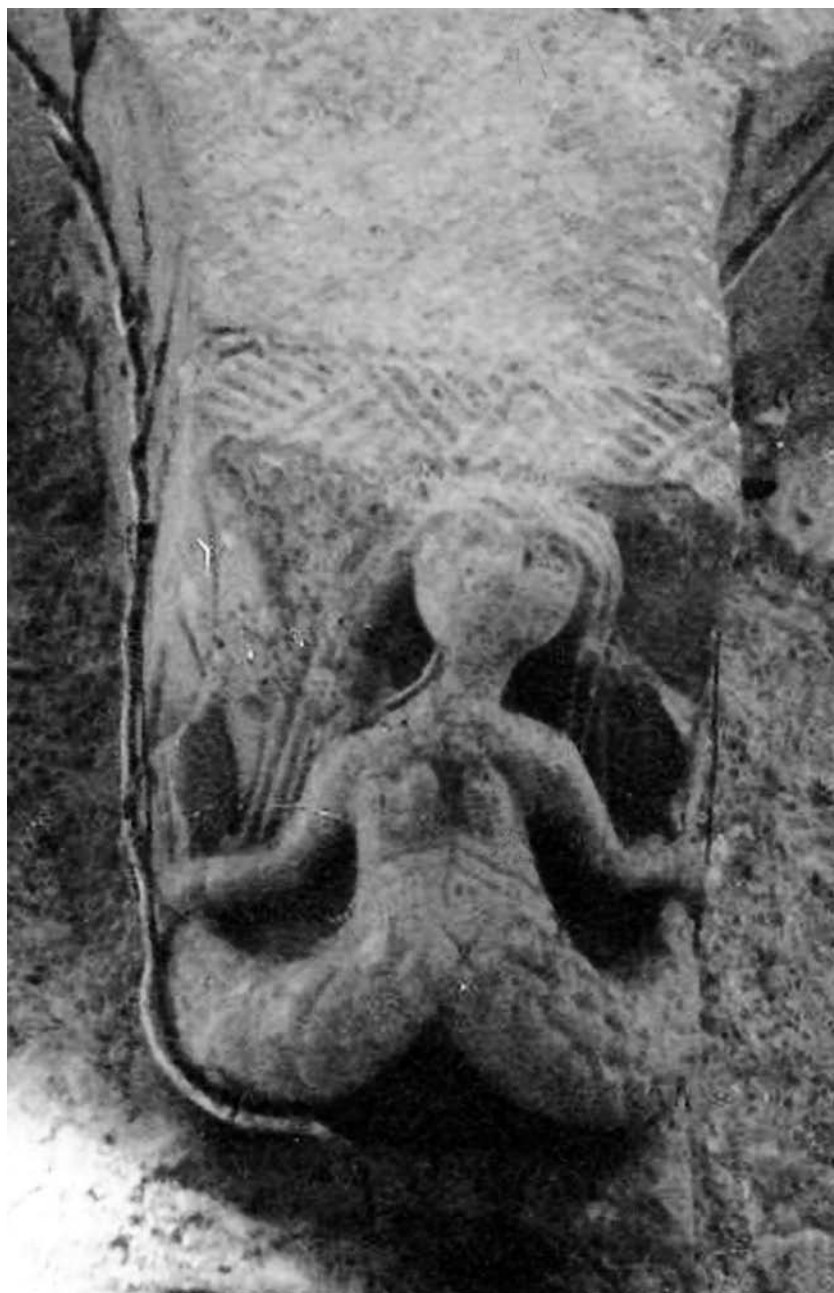


Fig. 18: Siren, La Salvetat



Fig. 19: Bird siren, Béziers



Fig. 20: Corbel from Miègeville door, Saint-Sernin de Toulouse





Fig. 21: Detail from Miègeville corbel



Fig. 22: Dionysus, British Museum, London



Fig. 23: Roman figure, Sant' Angelo dei Lombardi, Italy



Fig. 24: Sheela-na-Gig, Montfrin



Fig. 25: Sheela-na-Gig, Montfrin

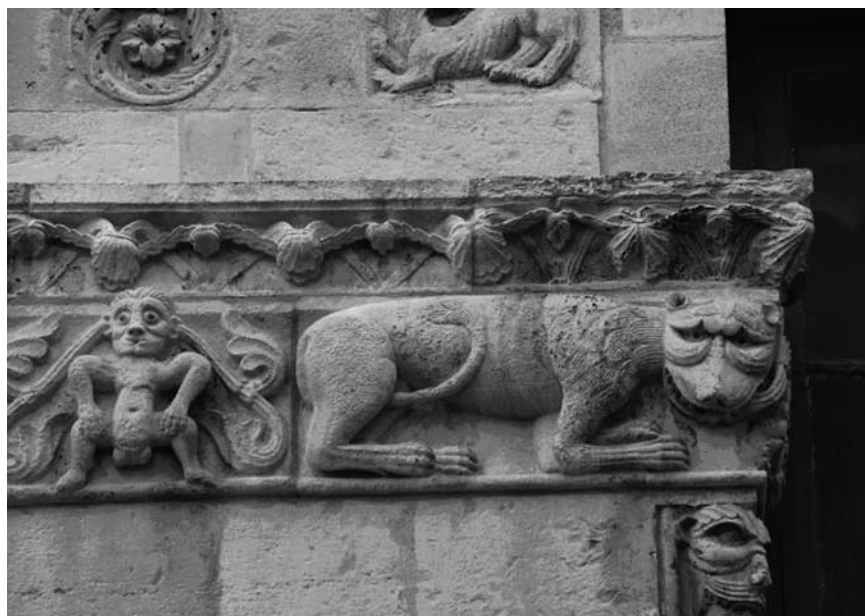


Fig. 26: Obscene from Nîmes, Maison romane

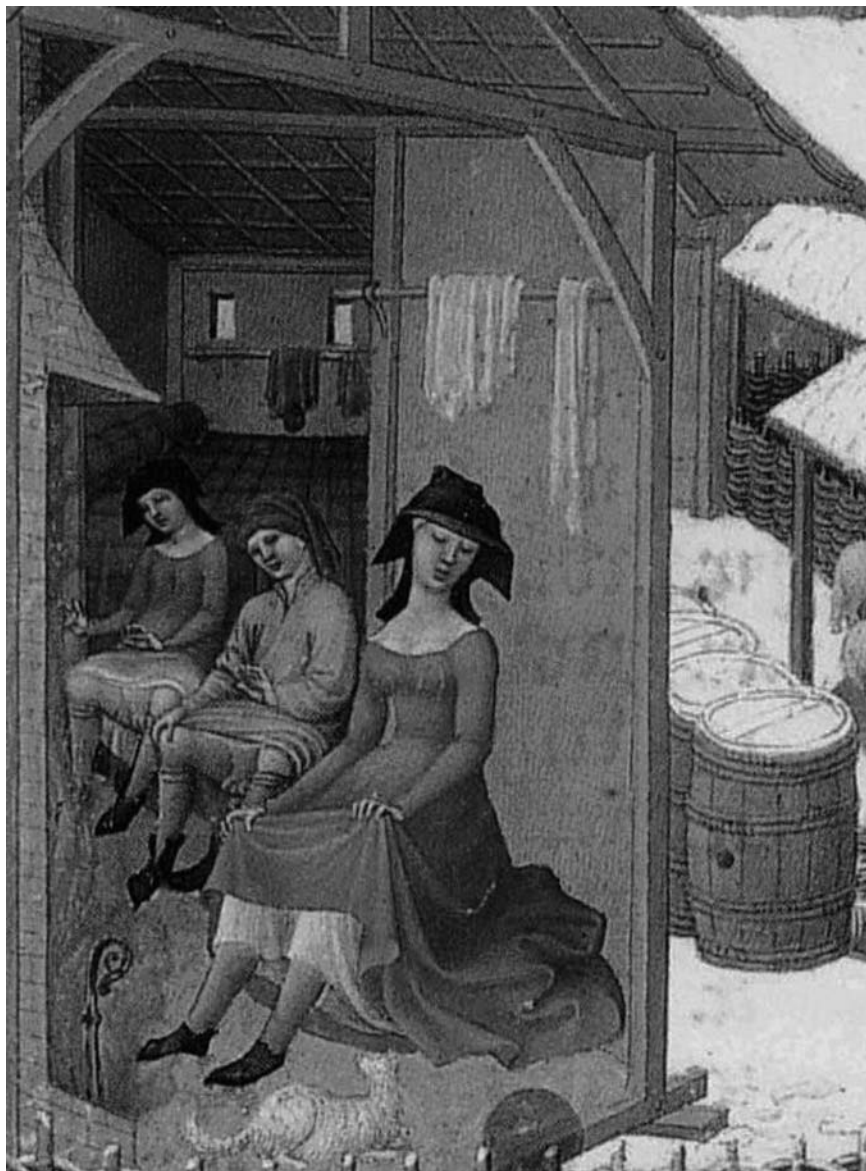


Fig. 27: Warming up, Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry



Fig. 28: Couple, Noalhac





Fig. 29: Couple, Perse



Fig. 30: Antique vase, Museum of Palermo

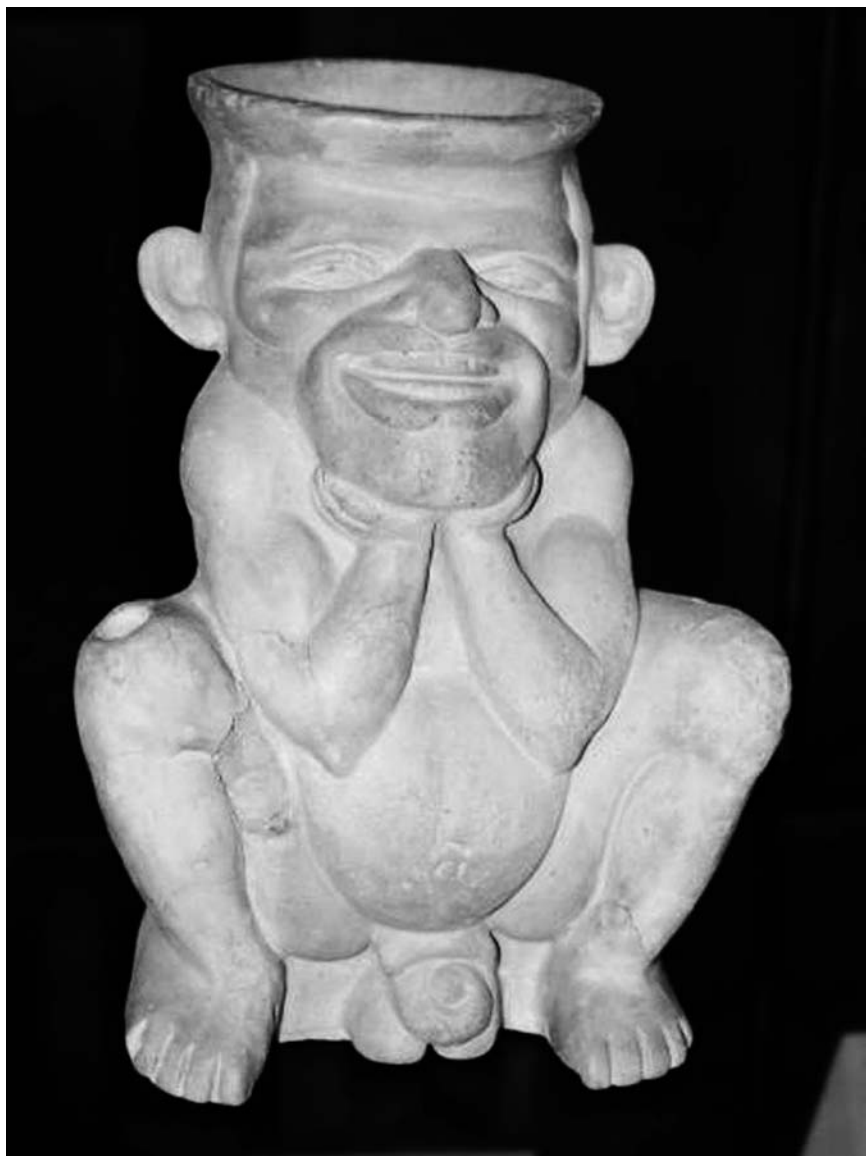


Fig. 31: Antique object, Museum of Agrigente

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## Heloise, Monastic Temptation, and *Memoria*: Rethinking Autobiography, Sexual Experience, and Ethics

There has long been a sense that Heloise's confessions of her sexuality as expressed in her *Epistola IV* (hereafter *Ep. IV*) to Abelard constitute a rare moment of heartfelt autobiography, an instance of a medieval woman speaking, unmediated, both of and from her body. This is a reading that became prevalent during the early modern rediscovery of the Letters of Heloise and Abelard; it appears in the *Argumenta* to the letters penned by their first editors, François d'Amboise (1616) and Richard Rawlinson (1717), and reaches a more general readership in the words of the eighteenth-century authors of the *Histoire Littéraire de la France* who declare that Heloise's letters constitute "heartfelt outpourings" in which "she lays bare the state of her soul".<sup>1</sup> Even so perceptive a modern scholar of medieval women's writings as Peter Dronke has declared that "in these Epistles . . . there is no playful posturing. The writer communicates what she feels she must."<sup>2</sup> Feminist and psychoanalytic analysis of the letters in the 1980s and 1990s spoke of the sexual elements in Heloise's letters in terms of desire, repression, rebellion, transgression, seduction, and the "self." These studies—by scholars such

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council for the provision of a Queen Elizabeth II Senior Research Fellowship which allowed me to undertake the research documented here. *Histoire littéraire de la France*, T. XII (Paris, 1763), 104: "un épanchement de cœur . . . C'est là qu'elle montre l'état de son âme à découvert." For the early modern reception of Heloise's letters, see my "From Virile Eloquence to Hysteria: Reading the Latinity of Heloise in the Early Modern Period," *Latinity and Alterity in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Yasmin A. Haskell and Juanita Feros Ruys. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, forthcoming October 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua († 203) to Marguerite Porete († 1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 108.

as Peggy Kamuf, Linda S. Kauffman, Andrea Nye, and Nancy Partner—took it as understood that Heloise was speaking, even if at times rhetorically, always also earnestly and honestly from a foundation in the erotic self.<sup>3</sup> This tradition was recently summarized by Suzanne Wayne who concluded that Heloise “used the letters to rebel and to express to Abelard her long-repressed desire.”<sup>4</sup>

In fact, what Heloise attempts to do in her *Ep. IV* is not nearly so anachronistic, and yet far more revolutionary, than has previously been realized. She is not staking a precocious high medieval claim either to autobiography or to an individual identity understandable by modern scholars in post-Romantic, psychoanalytic terms. We need here to understand the distinction articulated by Caroline Walker Bynum between the “discovery of the individual,” which was not a medieval concern, and the “discovery of the self,” which was an important aspect of twelfth-century spirituality and thought.<sup>5</sup> To this latter Heloise makes a unique contribution, while the material of her argument and her intended goals remain firmly grounded in twelfth-century monastic culture. Taking a traditional male monastic discourse of temptation and nocturnal emission that dates from the earliest centuries of Christian writings, Heloise rewrites this discourse to include female sexual desire; she then confronts the coenobitic principle of chastity with

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<sup>3</sup> Peggy Kamuf speaks of the “residue of a woman’s excessive desire” that pervades Heloise’s letters: *Fictions of Feminine Desire: Disclosures of Heloise* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982). Although Linda S. Kauffman notes the rhetorical nature of Heloise’s writings, she returns to the foundational idea that Heloise speaks of her desires directly from the body: “Not only is Heloise’s a historically authentic voice, but her discourse specifically commemorates her body’s desires”; “Heloise’s letters endure—a defiant transgression of the tyrannies of logic and abstinence, an affirmation of all that remains uncircumscribed, unrepented, and, alas, irremediable in the realm of desire,” *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 75 and 89. Andrea Nye argues that “For Heloise, there is no such separation between passion and thought. Her love and anger are constantly present in her language. Her passions are as thoughtful as her language is passionate,” “A Woman’s Thought or a Man’s Discipline? The Letters of Heloise and Abelard,” *Hypatia’s Daughters: Fifteen Hundred Years of Women Philosophers*, ed. Linda Lopez McAlister (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 25–47; here 40 (first published in *Hypatia* 7 [1992]: 1–22). Nancy F. Partner, championing a psychoanalytic reading of the letters, argues that “Heloise let herself speak from her self” and declares: “If there is any shock value in Heloise’s second letter, it is not found in a shocking eroticism, but in the shock of recognition we feel at being addressed so directly by a mind that speaks to us from the interior of the self”; see “No Sex, No Gender,” in *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, ed. Partner (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1993), 117–41; here 133, 134.

<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Wayne, “Desire in Language and Form: Heloise’s Challenge to Abelard,” *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Craig A. Berry and Heather Richardson Hayton. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 294 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 89–107; here 90.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, “Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?,” eadem, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1982), 82–109; here 87–88.

the medieval concept of *memoria*, arguing that her (female) “nocturnal emissions” do not mark a monastic body that is failing to realize its ideals, but rather an ethical body that is consonant both inwardly and outwardly.

The passage in Heloise’s letters which I particularly wish to examine here is the most famous statement of her sexual temptation, taken from her *Ep. IV* written to Abelard:

In tantum vero ille quas pariter exercuimus amantium voluptates dulces michi fuerunt ut nec displicere michi nec vix a memoria labi possint. Quocumque loco me vertam, semper se oculis meis cum suis ingerunt desiderii, nec etiam dormienti suis illusionibus parcant. Inter ipsa missarum sollempnia, ubi purior esse debet oratio, obscena earum voluptatum phantasmata ita sibi penitus miserrimam captivant animam ut turpitudinibus illis magis quam orationi vacem; que cum ingemiscere debeam de commissis, suspiro potius de amissis. Nec solum que egimus sed loca pariter et tempora in quibus hec egimus ita tecum nostro infixata sunt animo, ut in ipsis omnia tecum agam, nec dormiens etiam ab his quiescam. Nonnumquam etiam ipso motu corporis animi mei cogitationesprehenduntur, nec a verbis temperant improvisis.<sup>6</sup>

[Those pleasures of lovers which we enjoyed equally were so sweet to me that they cannot displease me nor scarcely be loosed from memory. In whatever place I turn, they always offer themselves before my eyes with their desires, nor even do they spare me, sleeping, their illusions. In the very celebration of the Mass, when prayer ought to be the more pure, the lewd phantasms of those pleasures so completely take hold of my most wretched soul that I am given over to their vileness rather than to prayer; when I ought to groan over what I have done, I sigh rather over what I have lost. Not only what we did but equally the places and times in which we did them are so impressed upon my heart along with you, that in them I do with you all things again, nor even sleeping can I have rest from them. Sometimes even by the very movement of my body the deliberations of my mind are apprehended, nor are they restrained from sudden words.]

It has become common in a post-Freudian era to assume that anyone speaking of sex—their desires, acts, and fantasies—will fundamentally be speaking the truth. This devolves from a psychoanalytic stance that understands sex as the great hidden—once one has uncovered the sexual impulse at the base of any thought or action, one will have arrived at the “truth” of that thought or action.<sup>7</sup> There is little

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<sup>6</sup> *La vie et les epistres Pierres Abaelart et Heloys sa fame: Traduction du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle attribuée à Jean de Meun. Avec une nouvelle édition des textes latin d’après le ms. Troyes Bibl. mun. 802*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris and Geneva: Champion-Slatkine, 1991), 66 line 189–67 line 1. Hereafter Hicks; my translation.

<sup>7</sup> This notion is argued with regard to medieval studies by Partner, “No Sex, No Gender,” esp. 121–31. For a consideration of psychoanalytic readings of medieval texts with particular regard to Heloise’s letters, see my “Playing Alterity: Heloise, Rhetoric, and *Memoria*,” *Maistresse of My Wit: Medieval Women, Modern Scholars*, ed. Louise D’Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys. Making the

leeway in this praxis for understanding sexual confession merely as a rhetorical cover or mask for something else. Yet this is the attitude we must take when considering patristic and medieval monastic sexual confession. As Peter Brown writes:

The abiding presence of sexual desire, and of sexual feeling in the mind of the monk, took on a new meaning. Sexuality became, as it were, a privileged ideogram. This did not mean that most ascetic spiritual guides treated sexual temptation as uniquely alarming. Far from it: sexual desire was frequently overshadowed, as a source of spiritual danger, by the dull aches of pride and resentment and by dread onslaughts of immoderate spiritual ambition.<sup>8</sup>

Monastic temptation is discussed in a range of early patristic writings (Paul, Augustine, Jerome, the Life of Antony, Gregory the Great), but I believe Cassian is Heloise's prime source. Cassian was *the* medieval authority with regard to nocturnal emissions,<sup>9</sup> and would have been entirely familiar to Heloise since, according to the Benedictine Rule, nuns would hear a daily reading from the *Conferences* prior to Compline.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as will be discussed in greater detail below, Heloise's statement of her temptation clearly parallels Cassian's confession of his own hankering after worldly stories, her arguments on hypocrisy are drawn from his discussion in *Conference* XII. XI "Quod multum intersit inter continentiam et castitatem" (That there is a great difference between chastity and continence), and when Abelard replies to Heloise's claims of sexual temptation and hypocrisy in his *Ep. V*, he takes precisely the line articulated by Cassian in *Conference* XII. V, thus indicating that both their arguments are founded in this common monastic source.

## 1. The Discourse of Monastic Temptation

When Heloise speaks of having a mind focused on worldly things rather than God while at prayer, of being troubled by nocturnal illusions, the unguarded

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Middle Ages, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 211–35; here 219–20. For a subtle, but very convincing argument against Freudian approaches, see Siegfried Christoph's contribution to this volume.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 229–30.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth C. Russell notes the statistic that around "ten percent of Cassian's total production" in the *Institutes* and *Conferences* deals with issues of monastic sexual temptation, "John Cassian on a Delicate Subject," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 27 (1992): 1–12; here 1, n. 1.

<sup>10</sup> RB 1980: *The Rule of St Benedict*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), XLII, 242: "si tempus fuerit prandii, mox surrexerint a cena, sedeant omnes in unum et legat unus Collationes vel Vitas Patrum aut certe aliud quod aedificet audientes . . . Si autem ieiunii dies fuerit, dicta vespera parvo intervallo mox accedant ad lectionem Collationum, ut diximus."

movements of her body, her pollution by images before Mass, she is not, contrary to post-medieval readings of her letters, making a shocking confession unheard-of in monastic practice; rather she is referring to a problem known commonly to beset those within the monastic profession, a problem dealt with in monastic texts of pastoral care. We must dispel the idea that a monastic writer, even one of high position such as an abbot (or abbess, or indeed, saint), writing about nocturnal sexual temptation was remarkable. Acknowledgement of sexual temptation was, in fact, and had been for many centuries, alarmingly common amongst eremites and monks, and an entire pastoral discourse had evolved to deal with the problem. Early patristic texts and, in particular, monastic rules, are full of references to the problem of nightly phantasms and nocturnal emissions—what they signify about the inner spiritual state of the sufferer, how culpable they render their sufferer, how they might be avoided, and whether they impact upon the sufferer's ability to give and / or receive communion. For instance, Cassian's *Conference* XII is entitled "De castitate" (On chastity) and contains such issues as C. IX: "Interrogatio, an corporis motum etiam dormientes possimus euadere" (Question as to whether even while sleeping we can avoid the stirrings of the flesh), while his *Conference* XXII deals specifically with "De nocturnis inlusionibus" (On nocturnal illusions). Throughout monastic history, prayers and hymns at Compline are particularly singled out as an important buttress against nightly attack.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, the issue of monastic temptation is a discourse that goes back to the Bible. W. G. East notes that Heloise's *Ep. IV* refers to the sufferings of the Apostle Paul, and he points out that Paul was commonly considered, particularly in the later medieval Latin tradition, to have been speaking in II Corinthians 12. 7 of having been beset by goads of lust all his adult life ("datus est mihi stimulus carnis meae angelus Sathanae ut me colaphizet"). East thus concludes that there is a rhetorical turn to Heloise's "confession": "Heloise recognised a fellow-sufferer, or rather saw in her own affliction something that had been dignified by troubling in equal measure the greatest of Christian saints. Hers was no common lust; she was possessed by a diviner lust, a Pauline lust, an Apostolic lust."<sup>12</sup> But there is a great deal more to Heloise's confession than simply this claim to fellow suffering. She is tapping here into a discourse that permeated the patristic and medieval world not just in order to profess identification with it, but in order to reconfigure it.

<sup>11</sup> See Dyan Elliott, "Pollution, Illusion, and Masculine Disarray: Nocturnal Emissions and the Sexuality of the Clergy," Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 14–34; here 20.

<sup>12</sup> W. G. East, "This Body of Death: Abelard, Heloise and the Religious Life," *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body*, ed. Peter Biller and A.J. Minnis. York Studies in Medieval Theology, 1 (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1997), 43–59; here 48.



There is a remarkable cast of great figures of the early church who admit to or are traditionally represented as having suffered sexual temptation: Antony, Jerome, Augustine, Benedict, and Evagrius of Pontus, who was Cassian's teacher.<sup>13</sup> Augustine declares in his *Confessions* (written 397–398), in words that could well have influenced Heloise, "in my memory, of which I have said much, the images of things imprinted upon it by my former habits still linger on. When I am awake they obtrude themselves upon me, though with little strength. But when I dream they not only give me pleasure but are very much like acquiescence in the act."<sup>14</sup> The sexual temptation suffered by Jerome, which he confesses in an exhortatory letter to one of his young female protégés,<sup>15</sup> finds particular resonances with the correspondence of Heloise and Abelard, given how they actively play the roles of Jerome and the women he mentored.<sup>16</sup>

Nor was this discourse of monastic temptation one that pertained solely to the ascetic desert ethos of the early church — there are a number of texts contemporary with Heloise's *Ep. IV* that show that the issue was an ongoing one. In the mid-eleventh century Otloh of St Emmeram wrote his "autobiographical" *Liber de temptatione cuiusdam monachi* (Book of the Temptation of a Certain Monk).<sup>17</sup> Otloh opens his account by declaring that after he became a monk the more he devoted himself to reading the holy Scriptures the more he was assailed by diabolical

<sup>13</sup> See David Brakke, "The Problematization of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 3 (1995): 419–60; and Brown, *The Body and Society*, 374.

<sup>14</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), Bk. 10.30, 233; Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. James J. O'Donnell, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1.135: "sed adhuc vivunt in memoria mea, de qua multa locutus sum, talium rerum imagines, quas ibi consuetudo mea fixit, et occurrantur mihi vigilantibus quidem carentes viribus, in somnis autem non solum usque ad delectationem sed etiam usque ad consensionem factumque simillimum."

<sup>15</sup> "Pallebant ora ieiuniis et mens desiderii aestuabat in frigido corpore et ante hominem suum iam carne premortua sola libidinum incendia bulliebant" (My face was pale with fasting; but though my limbs were cold as ice my mind was burning with desire, and the fires of lust kept bubbling up before me when my flesh was as good as dead), *Jerome: Select Letters*, ed. and trans. F. A. Wright. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1933), Letter XXII, Jerome to Eustochium, 66–68.

<sup>16</sup> See Alcuin Blamires, "No Outlet for Incontinence: Heloise and the Question of Consolation," *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 287–301.

<sup>17</sup> Ellen Joyce notes that Otloh's two key texts, the *Liber visionum* and *Liber de temptatione cuiusdam monachi*, "taken together with fragments of self-descriptions in Otloh's other works, are not formal autobiographies, but they do represent an approach towards writing about the self and about interior experience that is startlingly original in the context of the mid-eleventh century," "Speaking of Spiritual Matters: Visions and the Rhetoric of Reform in the *Liber visionum* of Otloh of St Emmeram," *Manuscripts and Monastic Culture: Reform and Renewal in Twelfth-Century Germany*, ed. Alison I. Beach. Medieval Church Studies, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 69–98; here 74. See also Joyce, "Scribal Performance and Identity in the Autobiographical Visions of Otloh of St Emmeram (d. 1067)," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 95–106; here 96–97.

attacks, to the end that “*delusiones satane varias vigilans ac dormiens pertuli*” (I suffered a range of satanic delusions both waking and sleeping). Otloh declares that although it would not be right to reveal the precise nature of these attacks, he wishes to relate in general both his battles against them and the salvific power of holy text in order to strengthen and edify both himself and others who might read of them.<sup>18</sup> Despite a lack of lurid detail, it becomes clear that at least some of these temptations that beset Otloh are of a sexual nature: “*Adhuc restat afflictio et temptatio una, id est passio concupiscentie carnalis diuturna*”<sup>19</sup> (There still remains one affliction and temptation, that is the ever-present suffering of carnal lust); “*Numquid ergo decem et septem annis iam laborasti, pugnans contra cogitationes desideriorum carnalium*” (Surely you have now labored for seventeen years fighting against the thoughts of carnal desires). But this, he notes, need not be viewed as extraordinary.

Otloh rehearses the list of early church figures who were known to have suffered from diabolical temptations (such as Paul, Athanasius, Antony, and Benedict), concluding that these examples indicate that there is nothing untoward or remarkable in the affliction of sexual temptation; in fact, it is something that besets every Christian, and one should at least give thanks that in a monastic environment, the stimuli provoking temptation will be limited.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, sexual temptation is something that has even been known to afflict the weaker sex just as much as the stronger, and Otloh recalls the stories from the *Vitas Patrum* of a holy abbess Sara who struggled for thirteen years against demonic sexual assault,<sup>21</sup> and Mary the Egyptian who wrestled with immoderate desires for seventeen years.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sabine Gäbe, *Otloh von St Emmeram “Liber de temptatione cuiusdam monachi”: Untersuchung, kritische Edition und Übersetzung*. Lateinische Sprache und Literatur des Mittelalters, 29 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 246, lines 11–15 and 248, lines 1–3: “Cumque post multum temporis ab hac impugnatione eriperetur, cogitans, qualiter per ea, que passus erat, tam ipse quam alii edificari possent, scripsit non solum illatas temptationis molestias, sed etiam sacre scripture verba, que ex divina inspiratione sibi provenerant. / Delusiones satane varias vigilans ac dormiens pertuli, quas licet universas nequeam promere, aliquas tamen memorie insitas, prout possum, volo referre.”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 306, lines 4–5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 300, lines 20–26 and 302, lines 1–3: “Isti igitur duo viri in exemplum humane persecutionis sufficiant tibi, ut non solum nihil insolitum, nihil inauditum te aliquando ab homine quoquam pertulisse arbitraris, sed nec particulam minimam earum persecutionum, quas alii pertulerunt, te passum esse noveris. Tu enim pro eo, quod aliquantulum adversitatis et persecutionis prius in saeculo constitutus pertulisti, et nunc in monasterio positus parvissimis temptationum stimulis, quibus etiam christianus omnis probandus erit, fatigaris, maioribus quam alii persecutionum temptationumque periculis afflictum te frequenter arbitraris.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 308, lines 12–18: “Et ut huiusmodi exempla non solum in fortiori, sed etiam in sexu habeas infirmiori, in vita patrum narratur, quoniam abbatissa quedam sancta nomine Sara. XIII. annis fortiter a fornicationis demone sit impugnata . . . Ecce fides qualis, et quantus amor pietatis, ecce quid uterque sexus laboraverit pro virtute castitatis.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 310, lines 30–31 and 312, lines 1–4, 10–12: “Legitur namque de Maria Egyptiaca, quoniam

Guibert of Nogent, writing only a decade or so prior to Heloise's *Ep. IV*, recounts a demonic attack suffered one night by his mother, which fits traditional representations of a "night-mare" or incubus. Guibert's mother had just retired to bed when she was oppressed by a force upon her chest: she seemed to be paralyzed, unable either to move or to make a sound. She was saved only by an angel appearing at her bedhead and invoking the aid of the Virgin Mary on her behalf.<sup>23</sup> Guibert also recounts ruefully how he stirred up libidinous thoughts in himself by paying excessive attention to the Latin poems of Ovid and others.<sup>24</sup> A decade or so after Heloise's letter, William of St Thierry's guide to the monastic interior life, his *Epistola ad fratres de Monte-Dei* (also known as the *Golden Letter*), makes reference to the past sensory and carnal affections that the aspiring monastic must shed, and the revenants of these affections (images, thoughts) that can appear at the time of prayer and Psalm-singing.<sup>25</sup>

What these accounts clearly reveal, then, is that at the time Heloise was writing in the early twelfth century, sexual temptation was an acknowledged part of monastic life and monastic writings, with a long and well-known history. Within this context, Heloise's confessions cannot be considered extraordinary, or as necessarily marking the rise of a newly self-aware premodern individual. Indeed, Ineke van 't Spijker warns against reading into the emergent texts of the self in the early twelfth century modern understandings of autobiography, highlighting rather the "conventional-monastic character" of the feelings that appear to be described therein.<sup>26</sup> That Heloise's "confession" sits firmly within a recognized

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inter cetera, que Zosime abbati de vite conversionisque sue qualitate referebat, dixit: Crede mihi abba, decem et septem annis feris et inrationabilibus luctabar desideriis. Et post pauca: Cogitationes autem, que ad fornicationem iterum compellebant me, quomodo tibi enarrare possum?... Ecce vides, quantum non solum virilis, sed etiam femineus sexus laboraverit et pro integritatis constantia et pro corruptionis penitentia."

<sup>23</sup> Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie*, ed. and trans. (into French) Edmond-René Labande (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1981), 90: "Cumque ejusdam noctis fieret intempestum et illa, atroci anxietate plenissima, proprium cubile foveret, sicut diabolo consuetudinarium est . . . subito vigilanti illi ipse Inimicus incubuit, et gravissimo pene usque ad extinctionem pondere jacentem oppressit. Cum sub hac ejus spiritus suffocaretur angustia, et omnium membrorum ex toto libertate careret, vocis autem cujuspiam sonitum nullatenus emittere posset, solumque Dei, muta penitus sed ratione libera, praestolaretur auxilium, ecce a lectuli ejus capite quidam spiritus . . . sic inclamare . . . coepit: 'Sancta Maria adjuva!'"

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 134: "Nimirum utrobique raptabar, dum non solum verborum dulcium, quae a poetis acciperam, sed et quae ego profunderam lasciviis irretirer, verum etiam per horum et his similibus revolutiones immodica aliquotiens carnis meae titillatione tenerer." Heloise also referred to Ovid as "that poet of lust and teacher of filth" ("poeta luxurie turpitudinisque doctor"), *Ep. VI*, Hicks, 89, lines 54–55.

<sup>25</sup> See Ineke van 't Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and the Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Disputatio, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 192, citing William's *Epistola*, paragraphs 61–65.

<sup>26</sup> Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life*, 235; see also 236: "Far from intending to explore the unknown

genre and discourse is made further evident when we consider Cassian's report of the temptations he suffered as a monk due to memories of the pagan texts he had read:

quippe cui praeter illas generales animae captiuitates, quibus non dubito infirmos quosque pulsari extrinsecus, speciale inpedimentum salutis accedit per illam quam tenuiter uideor adtigisse notitiam litterarum, in qua me ita uel instantia paedagogi uel continuae lectionis macerauit intentio, ut nunc mens mea poeticis illis uelut infecta carminibus illas fabularum nugas historiasque bellorum, quibus a paruulo primus studiorum inbuta est rudimentis, orationis etiam tempore meditetur, psallentique uel pro peccatorum indulgentia supplicanti aut inpudens poematum memoria suggeratur aut quasi bellantium heroum ante oculos imago uersetur, taliumque me phantasmatum imaginatio semper inludens ita mentem meam ad supernos intuitus adspirare non patitur, ut cotidianis fletibus non possit expelli. (*Conference XIV. XII*, Vol. 2, 199)<sup>27</sup>

[... so that now my mind, as though infected by poems, meditates upon those trifling tales and stories of wars with which it had been instructed from the time I was a boy, from the very beginning of my studies, even in the time of prayer, and either the shameless memory of these poems is present before me while I am singing Psalms or asking the remission of my sins, or it is as if an image of warring heroes appears before my eyes, and the mental image of such phantasms, always mocking me, does not allow my mind to aspire to higher considerations such that it cannot be expelled with daily weeping.]

The worldly temptations that call to Cassian here might not be of the same sexual nature as Heloise's, but his statement of disturbance by mental images and phantasms at times of prayer, Psalm-singing, and confession clearly provides a template for her own later declarations.

Also arguing against, or at least relativizing, the "autobiographical" nature of Heloise's confession is the case of Rather of Verona. While the instances described by Otloh and the early church fathers may well have been cases of genuine biological/psychological torment, it is important to realize that confession of sexual temptation could equally play other, more rhetorical, roles. For instance, in his mid-tenth-century (955) *Liber confessionis* (or *Dialogus Confessionalis*), Rather, an elderly monk, and a respected abbot and bishop, makes an extraordinary claim to suffering from, and indeed indulging himself in, sexual fantasies:

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regions of the mind or shock his readers into recognition of new experience, the medieval author draws upon and takes advantage of the knowledge of his readers."

<sup>27</sup> All references to Cassian's *Conferences* are to Jean Cassien, *Conférences*, ed. and trans. (into French) E. Pichéry. 3 Vols. Sources Chrétiennes, 42, 54, and 64 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1955–1959); all translations of the *Conferences* are my own.

Peccaui ego peccator in osculo et in amplexibus illecebrosis, palpando et blandiendo inique; et in ecclesia stans uel sedens, ubi sanctae lectiones uel diuina officia efficiuntur, otiosis fabulis uel iniquis cogitationibus me occupauit, et non cogitaui quae debui, sed magis quae non debui, et aures non accomodaui ad ea quae sancta sunt, intuendo quoque iniuste et petulanter et recordando (quod adhuc peius) uirorum, animalium pecudumque concubitus et alia quaedam obscena.<sup>28</sup>

[I, a sinner, have sinned in kissing and wanton embraces, in wicked caresses and fondling. And in church, standing or sitting, when the holy readings or sacred offices were going on, I have given myself over to otiose tales or wicked thoughts, and I have not considered what I ought to consider, but rather what I ought not to consider, and I have not lent my ears to those things which are holy; and I have sinned in unrighteous and wanton contemplation and (what is still worse) in fantasizing the mating of men, animals, and beasts, and other obscene things.]<sup>29</sup>

Yet it is universally agreed that this text by Rather is in no way meant to be read as autobiographically true. Peter L. D. Reid notes the received opinion that “this is not a true and genuine confession but an unusual work of criticism, in which Rather attacks the faults of others by attributing them to himself and confessing them as his sins; so when he describes his own sins, he is in fact censuring others” and the allied view that “the work is not so much confession as invective, where Rather in his acerbic manner criticizes the monks of Alna for faults which he applies to himself.”<sup>30</sup> In a similar manner, Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus interpret the later description of demonic temptation made by Christina of Stommeln to the Dominican Petrus Dacus: “Here, a religious woman establishes herself with the means of extravagant and almost intolerable suffering. What at first glance reads as a personal confession, a pouring out of intimate experiences, reveals a public dimension and curious gender dynamics.”<sup>31</sup>

In like wise, because the passage cited from Heloise’s letter is drawn from a recognized monastic discourse, then, contrary to almost all readings of this passage since its early modern reception, we do not necessarily have to believe that Heloise *in fact* experienced these phantasms and indulged in what appears to be sacrilegious behavior (any more than we have to believe it is literally true that at her veiling she somewhat blasphemously recited Cornelia’s tribute to Pompey

<sup>28</sup> Ratherii Veronensis, *Dialogus Confessionalis*, ed. Peter L.D. Reid, CCCM 46A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), c. 8, 224. My thanks to Prof. Robert Levine, Boston, for drawing this passage to my attention.

<sup>29</sup> Rather of Verona, *Excerptum ex Dialogo Confessionali*, in *The Complete Works of Rather of Verona*, trans. Peter L. D. Reid (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991), 266–314; here 274

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>31</sup> Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus, “Introduction: Women Writing Letters in the Middle Ages,” *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Cherewatuk and Wiethaus. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 1–19; here 14.

from Lucan's *Pharsalia*). What Heloise enunciates in this passage is not a veracious confession; rather she is formulating a claim that will allow her to gain access to a particular discourse so that she can question and subvert its phallogentrism.<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Feminizing the Discourse

It has been argued that monastic sexual temptation was almost exclusively viewed and treated as a masculine problem from the time of the early Church up until the thirteenth century, when the rise of female mysticism fostered a context in which women were both open to, and could confess to being open to, demonic attack, and when the introduction of Aristotelian theory to the West raised new questions about women's role in sex and impregnation.<sup>33</sup> In part the discourse of monastic temptation in the early Church was male-centered because it involved questions of fitness to celebrate communion (an issue which harked back to Old Testament prohibitions on uncleanness<sup>34</sup>) and the integrity of coenobitic life, which then pertained only to men.<sup>35</sup> In part, however, it was also primarily a male discourse because it was grounded in male physiology—the bodily functions of erection and ejaculation. Monastic thinkers had articulated a number of likely causes and cures for nocturnal fantasies, one of which was that gluttony could cause nocturnal emissions by filling the body with superfluous humors; one of the means recommended for combating nocturnal emissions was therefore strict limitation of food and drink, particularly prior to retirement for the night. As Cassian argued:

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<sup>32</sup> I am not by this arguing that Heloise did *not* suffer from some form of sexual temptation during her years of monastic claustration that manifested itself in erotic dreams and fantasies; I am arguing that this letter cannot in itself be taken as evidence that she did, since it serves a distinctly rhetorical, rather than autobiographical or confessional function.

<sup>33</sup> See Brakke, "The Problematicization of Nocturnal Emissions," 420 n. 3: "the Christians discussed here speak only of men experiencing nocturnal emissions . . . the monastic literature is aimed primarily, if not exclusively, at male ascetics." See also Elliott, "Pollution, Illusion, and Masculine Disarray," 15: "despite efforts of doctors and the occasional theologian to make pollution an equal opportunity offense for men and women, the discourse was inescapably framed around masculine embarrassments"; and "From Sexual Fantasy to Demonic Defloration: The Libidinous Female in the Later Middle Ages," *Fallen Bodies*, 35–60.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Leviticus 15. 16–17: "vir de quo egreditur semen coitus lavabit aqua omne corpus suum et immundus erit usque ad vesperum; vestem et pellem quam habuerit lavabit aqua et immunda erit usque ad vesperum"; and Deuteronomy 23. 10–11: "si fuerit inter vos homo qui nocturno pollutus sit somnio egredietur extra castra et non revertetur priusquam ad vesperam lavetur aqua et post solis occasum regredietur in castra."

<sup>35</sup> See Brakke, "The Problematicization of Nocturnal Emissions," and Elliott, "From Sexual Fantasy to Demonic Defloration," 35.

urinae collectio, cum uesticae capacitatem quiescentibus nobis indesinenti confluxu interni umoris oppleuerit, excitet membra marcentia, quod etiam paruulis uel spadonibus eadem nihilominus lege contingit. Unde fit ut, si non oblectatio libidinis uulnerat mentis adsensum, confusione tamen eam humiliet turpitudine membrorum. (*Conference XII. IX*, Vol. 2, 136)

[the collection of urine, when it will have filled the capacity of the bladder for those of us who are sleeping by the unceasing flow of the inner humors, also excites the drooping members, which happens notwithstanding by the same compulsion even to young boys or eunuchs. Wherefore it comes about that even if no delight of lust attacks the assent of the mind, yet the disgrace of the members still humbles it with confusion.]

That this process is fundamentally a biologically male process is underlined by Cassian's insistence that even those who are not viewed as fully male in a social sense, such as boys and eunuchs, are nevertheless affected by it.

It is precisely this "maleness" of monastic temptation that Heloise confronts and contests with her claims of nocturnal fantasies. She makes the point—still largely unacknowledged at this time in the early twelfth century—that women religious also suffer from sexual temptation and that the existing pastoral literature makes no space either to recognize this or to deal with it sympathetically.<sup>36</sup> Heloise achieves this not simply by "confessing" (or appearing to confess) her sexual temptations, but by actively regendering her sexual desire as "male" sexual desire.

On the whole, women depicted as coming under demonic attack in the Middle Ages were viewed as being at risk because they possessed vulnerable, penetrable bodies—for instance, Guibert's mother suffers precisely the sort of external, invasive incubus that would increasingly often terrify women of the later medieval period. Heloise's concern, however, is not this feminine worry, but rather a typically male unease: not that what is outside her body might come in, but rather that what is inside her body might come out.<sup>37</sup> That is, she does not articulate the passive, impregnable body that generally characterized women under demonic attack in the Middle Ages; on the contrary, she writes for herself an active, ejaculating body: "nec dormiens etiam ab his quiescam. Nonumquam etiam ipso motu corporis animi mei cogitationes deprehenduntur, nec a verbis temperant improvisis" (nor even sleeping can I have rest from them. Sometimes even by the very movement of my body the deliberations of my mind are apprehended, nor

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<sup>36</sup> By contrast, as Elliott notes: "The discursive logic framing wet dreams was exculpatory in nature, founded upon the palliation of masculine embarrassments and the furtherance of clerical goals," "From Sexual Fantasy to Demonic Defloration," 35.

<sup>37</sup> See Brakke, "The Problematicization of Nocturnal Emissions," 454: "The female virginal body was valued for its integrity, the absence of penetration: the danger was invasion from without. For Cassian's male body, however, the danger was within: defilement occurred when something inside the monk erupted into view."

are they restrained from sudden words). Here her “*motu corporis*” (movement of the body) recalls the descriptions of erections in the monastic literature of sexual temptation, and her “*verbis improvisis*” (words rashly bursting forth) represent verbal ejaculations, configured in parallel to male seminal emissions.<sup>38</sup>

Heloise’s insistence here on the sexuality of the individual female monastic body leads into her next letter (*Ep. VI* of the correspondence) where she will focus on the biological femaleness and fertility of the communal female monastic body, in her arguments on the importance of acknowledging the function of menstruation within traditional monastic frameworks, in particular the Benedictine Rule.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. Temptation and Will

Heloise might, by the claims she has made, have focused Abelard’s attention on the issue of female monastic sexual temptation, but there remains the problem that the pastoral literature Heloise cites to justify her claims of nocturnal temptation also clearly condemns her actions. Patristic authorities were divided on whether or not a nocturnal emission could be excused if it occurred without, or even in defiance of, the sleeper’s will, or whether in such a case, the external event simply proved the lack of complete inner chastity on the part of the monk.<sup>40</sup> There is no

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<sup>38</sup> In fact, as Pieter Willem van der Horst points out, female ejaculation of seed was not an unknown concept in the ancient, patristic, and medieval worlds: see “Sarah’s Seminal Emission: Hebrews 11.11 in the Light of Ancient Embryology,” *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 287–302. Van der Horst cites a number of ancient authorities and notes that Galen was highly influential in transmitting a theory of female sperm to the Middle Ages (295).

<sup>39</sup> See Peggy McCracken, “The Curse of Eve: Female Bodies and Christian Bodies in Heloise’s Third Letter,” *Listening to Heloise*, 217–231; and Carmel Posa, “Desire: The Language of Love in the Feminine in Heloise’s Letters,” *Words of Love and Love of Words*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 347 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 129–48. Elliott and Brakke also note the contiguity between nocturnal emissions and menstruation in the monastic literature of bodily integrity: see Elliott, “Pollution, Illusion, and Masculine Disarray,” 12 and “From Sexual Fantasy to Demonic Defloration,” 36; and Brakke, “The Problematic of Nocturnal Emissions,” 420, n. 3. This line of development in Heloise’s arguments between her *Epp. IV* and *VI* demonstrates that there is no radical rupture between these two letters. Rather, Heloise moves from consideration of the individual monastic woman (exemplified by herself) in *Ep. IV* to consideration of the community of monastic women *qua* women in *Ep. VI*. As Posa, “Desire,” 141, writes: “In her transfiguration into the body of the community, Heloise expresses exactly the same desires using the same arguments as she has in her previous letters, concerning the ethics of intention, the struggle with the body, its feminine specificity and the need to recognize this body’s relationship to Abelard, but now she is the communal body.”

<sup>40</sup> See Brakke, “The Problematic of Nocturnal Emissions,” 421: “Christians held nearly every conceivable position: some believed that such emissions were always defiling, others that they



doubt, however, that the sort of deliberate meditation on past carnal loves that Heloise expresses in her *Ep. IV*, particularly during her waking hours, would have rendered her entirely culpable in this regard, especially with reference to receiving Communion. As Cassian writes:

Verum si hostis ille nequissimus, ut nobis caelestis remedii subtrahat medicinam, custodiae sopitae mentis inluserit, ita dumtaxat, ut nullo reprehensibili interueniente pruritu, nullo oblectationis contaminetur adsensu, sed egestionem aliquam pro natura per necessitatem compulsam aut certe inpugnatione diaboli absque sensu uoluptatis elicita ad impedimentum nostrae sanctificationis obtenderit, possumus et debemus ad gratiam salutaris cibi confidenter accedere. Sin uero nostro uitio haec fuerit egesta concretio, conuenientes conscientiam nostram illud apostolicum formidemus: *Qui manducauerit panem et biberit calicem domini indigne, reus erit corporis et sanguinis domini*. (Conference XXII. V, Vol. 3, 120)

[But if that most evil enemy should deceive the guardian of the sleeping mind in order that he should draw away from us the remedy of heavenly healing, so that we are contaminated by no interference of reprehensible itching, no assent to delight, but only that he has obstructed our path by some emission impelled either by Nature through necessity, or most surely elicited by the attack of the Devil without sense of lust to the impediment of our sanctification, we can and we ought to proceed confidently to the grace of the salvific meal. But if this emission of congealed matter should be by our own sin, conforming our conscience, we ought to fear according to the words of the Apostle: "He who eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."]

Writings by Heloise's contemporaries show that this reading of sexual temptation continued to hold sway in the twelfth century. Indeed, Otloh makes it clear that giving in to sexual temptation once simply leaves one more vulnerable to subsequent attacks.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. The Ethics of *Memoria*

It is at this point that Heloise does something quite revolutionary with the discourse of monastic temptation—she reinterprets both deliberate reflection on carnal love and inadvertent bodily compulsion through the ethics of *memoria*.

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were never so, and still others that some emissions were defiling and some not."  
<sup>41</sup> Otloh von St Emmeram "*Liber de temptatione cuiusdam monachi*," 306, lines 8–14: "Sed hoc in primis pensandum est, quia is, qui numquam et qui sepius carnis corruptionem expertus est, nulla possunt collectatione coequari. Quamvis enim utrique impugnatione gravi affligantur, is tamen, qui huiusmodi vitio fragilitate humana devictus sepe succubuit, tanto longiora et graviora passionum carnalium certamina sustinebat, quanto frequentius eisdem passionibus consentiens semet subiecit."

On the whole, in the discourse of monastic temptation, memory is viewed as part of the problem: in *Conference* III. VI, Cassian talks of the three renunciations of monastic life, of which the third is a turning from “every memory of this world which presents itself to the sight of your eyes” (“omni memoria mundi huius quae oculorum occurrit obtutibus”, Vol. 1, 145); he then goes on to speak of monastic vocation in terms of forgetting (“obliuio”).<sup>42</sup> In *Conference* XXII. III he notes the role of unrestrained wanderings of the mind (“cogitationum peruagatio”) in arousing the seeds of all previous passions (“pristinorum omnium passionum . . . semina”), thus provoking both phantasmal visitors (“inlecebrosis phantasmatibus”) and nocturnal emissions (“obsceni umores”).<sup>43</sup> His own “confession” of temptation raises images of his “shameless memory” (“impudens memoria”) that insisted on dwelling on pagan poems and tales of war. Indeed, he argues that memories of women—even apparently harmless ones, such as of sisters, mothers, or holy women—must be instantly repelled by the monastic male in order to avoid them becoming fodder for the devil, the imagination, and ultimately, temptation.<sup>44</sup> Amongst writers more closely contemporary with Heloise, Peter Damian relates in his mid-eleventh-century life of St Romuald how Romuald was tempted nightly over fifteen years by a devil that, as well as attacking him physically, attempted to distract him by constantly recalling to his memory the cares and concerns of the world.<sup>45</sup> Guibert recalls himself as a young man being led astray from God’s plan by rolling over and over in his mind fantasies of what a great man he would become.<sup>46</sup> William of St Thierry speaks frequently of memory in his *Expositio* on

<sup>42</sup> This was a monastic position that continued through the Middle Ages; see for instance, Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. Ch. 10: “Monastic Memory in Service of Oblivion”.

<sup>43</sup> *Conférences*, Vol. 3, 117: “Cuius erroris atque socordiae uitio consequenter eueniet, ut non solum multimoda cogitationum peruagatio inuerecunde atque procaciter secretum mentis inrumpat, sed etiam pristinorum omnium passionum intra eam semina perseuerent. Quae quamdiu in eius adytis delitescunt, quamuis rigido corpus ieiunio castigetur, tamen nihilominus dormientem inlecebrosis phantasmatibus inquietant, quibus ante legitimi temporis cursum non iam ex naturae necessitate, sed adhuc ex fraude nequitiae obsceni eliciantur umores.”

<sup>44</sup> See Brakke, “The Problematicization of Nocturnal Emissions,” 455, citing Cassian’s *Institute* 6.13.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Damian, *Vita beati Romualdi*, ed. Giovanni Tabacco. *Fonti per la storia d’Italia* pubblicate dall’Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 94 (Rome: Istituto storico italiano, 1957), c. 7, 27: “Impugnabant tamen diabolus Romualdum multis et variis temptationum inmissionibus, maxime initio conversionis, mentem que eius per multa vitiorum incentiua raptabat, modo illi in memoriam revocans quae et quanta ut puta vir strenuus, in saeculo acquirere potuit . . . O quam sepe cellulam eius percuteis, eum cum adhuc vix obdormisceret excitavit et quasi iam iam imminente crepusculo per totam noctem vigilando deduxit! Per continuum ferme quinquennium super pedes eius et crura diabolus nocturno tempore iacuit, et ne huc illuc que se facile verteret, tipo phantastici ponderis aggravavit.”

<sup>46</sup> Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie*, 122: “Cum ergo, paulatim succrescente corpusculo, etiam animam in concupiscentiis pro suo modulo et cupiditatibus prurientem saecularis vita titillaret, memoria et rotatu creberrimo qualis quantusque in saeculo esse potuissem, eadem pene semper

the Song of Songs, noting how it can cause to lodge in the mind images of worldly things long after their corporeal forms have departed and the devoted monastic is secluded in his cell.<sup>47</sup>

Yet the discourse of monastic temptation was not the only twelfth-century discourse to employ the terminology of “phantasmata” and “cogitationes.” What Heloise evokes in her “confession,” is not simply “memory” in the sense of repetitive recollection. She uses the same Latin word—*memoria*—but she adduces a specific sense of this word, one which had strong classical antecedents and held a growing significance in scholastic thought in the high Middle Ages: “*Memoria* meant . . . trained memory, educated and disciplined according to a well-developed pedagogy that was part of the elementary language arts—grammar, logic, and rhetoric.”<sup>48</sup> Specifically, Heloise evokes the practice of *memoria rerum*. This act had been described by Augustine in Book X of his *Confessions* as the creation, retention, and recall of images and emotions. Mary Carruthers notes that Augustine used it to refer to “many varieties of mental phenomena: to ‘images’ of things he has experienced . . . and to emotional experiences.”<sup>49</sup> *Memoria rerum* was a complex and advanced form of memory, more advanced, for instance, than mere *memoria verborum*, the memorization of words or texts. More significantly, within the medieval system of thought, *memoria rerum* was viewed as fundamentally an ethical practice; it was, as Carruthers states, “the task that produced wisdom and built character, and could help to perfect one’s soul.”<sup>50</sup>

It seems clear that Heloise adduces this mnemonic system in order to complicate and problematize the primary (and damning) reading that her passage invokes, that of the unrepentant fantasizing sinner who should not take Communion. That she is deliberately citing the practice of *memoria* is evident in the language she chooses. For instance, she is specific about the material nature of what she is remembering (Abelard’s image, the things they did together, the times and places they did these), and her terminology is appropriate: she uses the term “*memoria*,” the images she describes as “phantasmata,” she says they are fixed or impressed

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repetendo revolverem . . . .”

<sup>47</sup> Expositio, XII, 62 : “cum absint corpora, non absint eorum imagines; cum cessent actus, non cessent eorum affectus; cum uoces sileant, perstrepat earum significationes” (although bodies are absent, images of them are not; although actions have ceased, the feelings aroused by them have not; although voices have fallen silent, the meanings spoken by them continue to resonate); *Expositio super Canticum Cantorum*, ed. Paul Verdeyen. Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis, 87 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 51, lines 58–60.

<sup>48</sup> See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 7.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 30–31.

("infixa sunt") upon her heart;<sup>51</sup> she deliberates, almost meditates, upon them in her mind ("cogitationes").

As Carruthers says, *cogitatio* "necessarily uses memory because it combines *imagines* from memory's store. One should think of a single *cogitatio* or 'thought' as a small-scale composition, a bringing together of various 'bits' (*phantasmata*) in one's inventory."<sup>52</sup> More significantly, *cogitatio* is intimately connected with *affectus*; it takes its flight from the emotions and uses the emotional responses aroused by memory-images to produce reasoned texts.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Carruthers cites Quintilian's arguments that "[t]hese *imagines* generate the very emotions in the orator which he seeks to awaken in his audience, and cause him to re-experience (vicariously make present again) what happened" — this will result in eloquence and persuasiveness.<sup>54</sup> In short, Heloise's language signals deliberate practice, and while in the context of monastic profession this practice might be read as sinful (the deliberate mediation upon carnal love), she is making the argument that it nevertheless remains in its own context ethical — as well as rhetorically effective.

Moreover, while the involuntary movements of Heloise's body in sleep may be accepted as morally neutral in the context of monastic life<sup>55</sup> (such movements are not necessarily indicative of sin although they are indicative that the sufferer has not yet attained complete chastity since this would continue untroubled even in sleep), they are valorized within the epistemological system of memory practice. D. Vance Smith argues that in his *De musica*, Augustine founds his discussion of memory on the body:

Actions and places are remembered by the repetition of physical acts. Since memory is derived from sensual impressions, it is fundamentally a bodily practice, and the repetitions that invoke the exercise of memory are really the rhythms that configure the body, or that are produced by its natural movements. The return of the body to particular places is often enough to awaken traces of memory that were impressed there. We naturally seek out the rhythms that articulate the movements of the body.<sup>56</sup>

What this means, as Augustine argues, is that a "motus membrorum" (movement of the body) can recall a previous "motus animi" (thought/emotion). Thus, when

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<sup>51</sup> See Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 27: "It is apparent from the metaphors they chose to model the processes of memory and perception that the *imagines* were thought in some way to occupy physical space. They are 'incised' or 'stamped' into matter, they are 'stored' and can be recalled or reconstructed by means of memorial storage."

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 148–49.

<sup>55</sup> See Cassian, *Conference XII*. X, Vol. 2: "Responsio, quod per somnum accidens carnis conmotio non officiat castitati" (Reply that stirrings of the flesh arising in the course of sleep do not vitiate chastity).

<sup>56</sup> Smith, "Irregular Histories: Forgetting Ourselves," *New Literary History* 28 (1997): 161–84; here 165.

Heloise bears testament to the erotic and emissive movements of her body under the influence of dreams, she is in fact claiming, via the ethical practice of *memoria*, the confirmation and validation of her former and continuing love for Abelard, and declaring the consonance, so important to her, of the interior and exterior person. Heloise thus constitutes a knowing self—and indeed a female monastic knowing self—that accepts its carnal memories. Where some of her monastic contemporaries were developing the idea of the evolved mind that could apprehend without, or beyond, the intermediary of the senses, Heloise refuses to repudiate, and indeed endorses, the knowledge of the body. This links her with later women mystics and the more corporeal foundations of their epistemology,<sup>57</sup> although Heloise comes to this “body knowledge” not just through the medium of sensation, but equally through familiarity with Latin rhetorical and scholastic discourses. At the same time, she remains more body-centered than the Latin scholastic and historiographic tradition would ordinarily allow, refusing to reduce her remembered past into mere words,<sup>58</sup> but continuing to experience it in her body.

Thus, when Heloise claims that she is a hypocrite,<sup>59</sup> this is patently untrue. Heloise is in fact problematizing the figure of the hypocrite at the same time as she ostensibly claims it.<sup>60</sup> Cassian had argued that “nocturnal emissions are problematic . . . because they suggest the persistence of boundaries between a person’s ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ . . . . A nocturnal emission indicates . . . that the

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<sup>57</sup> See for instance *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200–1550*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker. Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts, 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, 284–85, says of the twelfth century: “History, then, as the literal sense, was meant to be transcended by being interpreted and understood, the sense experience of something represented as a primary signification, thereafter must be conceived by intellection in its universal, a-temporal nature . . . . An understanding of what is meant by *historia* in this period, therefore depends on an understanding of the faculties of the soul and how it comes to know and understand the meaning of individual sensual experiences in a more universal mode, through words, which directly substitute for the absent sensual experience. History, thus understood, is a direct consequence of grammatical studies in the arts course, premised on a theory of cognition through signs.”

<sup>59</sup> Hicks, 67, lines 216–21: “Castam me predicant, qui non deprehendunt ypocritam; munditiam carnis conferunt in virtutem: cum non sit corporis sed animi virtus, aliquid laudis apud homines habens, nichil apud Deum mereor, qui cordis and renum probator est et in abscondito videt” (They call me chaste who do not discern that I am a hypocrite; they consider purity of the flesh as a virtue: since virtue is not of the body but of the soul, bearing some praise amongst men, I deserve none before God, who is the tester of hearts and marrows and sees in the hidden places).

<sup>60</sup> Catherine Brown notes that Heloise rhetorically plays the role of the hypocrite, but not that she assumes the role in order to deny it; see “*Mulieriter: Doing Gender in the Letters of Heloise*,” *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1996), 25–51; here 35–37. This also answers Brooke Heidenreich Findley’s evocation of the “liar paradox” in her discussion of Heloise’s claims of hypocrisy: see “Sincere Hypocrisy and the Authorial Persona in the Letters of Heloise,” *Romance Notes* 45 (2005): 281–292; here 285–86.

monk has still not brought his inner self, the 'spirit' or 'heart,' into conformity with his outer self, 'the flesh': while the outer person may be chaste, the inner person may still be lustful."<sup>61</sup> Yet this is precisely the lack of conformity Heloise contests through the claim of *memoria*; on the contrary, she suggests, her nocturnal actions and emissions in fact bring her body into conformity with her heart and mind. When Heloise makes the claim of being a hypocrite, she expects Abelard, with whom she had discussed and perhaps developed the ethic of intention (which she would further explicate in her *Ep. VI* and he would develop at length in his *Ethica seu Scito teipsum*), to acknowledge her true arguments *against* hypocrisy in a cloistered but yet desiring female body, hidden under her "confession". She challenges him to recognize the ethical position of interiority that she is enunciating and repeat it back to her, thus absolving her of hypocrisy.<sup>62</sup>

Instead, Abelard retreats to the familiar ground of monastic pastoral discourse, and simply rehearses Cassian's traditional consolations, contrasting Heloise's struggle against sexual temptation with his own state of castration and cooled desire: "The many greater sufferings of the heart through the continual prompting of the flesh of your own youth he has reserved for a martyr's crown . . . For the one who must always strive there is also a crown . . . But no crown is waiting for me, because no cause for striving remains. The matter for strife is lacking in him from whom the thorn of desire is pulled out."<sup>63</sup> This response is clearly drawn from Cassian's *Conference XII. V*, "De utilitate inpugnationis quae nobis de incentiuorum aestibus generatur" (On the value of battling the prickings of lust), where Cassian argues that eunuchs are only tepid in pursuing chastity since they do not need to fight their flesh to preserve continence.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Brakke, "The Problematization of Nocturnal Emissions," 448–49.

<sup>62</sup> As Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire*, 73, notes: "there is every reason to believe that it is Heloise herself who provides the evidence of her double life, that she is the one making a conscious effort to expose it. The device of drawing attention to her own duplicity is itself a strategy of doubleness." Marilyn Desmond also adduces the ethic of intention with respect to Heloise's erotic "confession" here, but without recognizing the discourses of either monastic temptation or *memoria* that inflect it: see "Dominus / Ancilla: Rhetorical Subjectivity and Sexual Violence in the Letters of Heloise," *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*, ed. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 35–54; here 49–50.

<sup>63</sup> *Ep. V*, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, trans. Betty Radice, rev. Michael T. Clanchy (London: Penguin, 2003), 87; Hicks, 85, line 533–86, line 539: "multas adhollescentie tue maiores animi passiones ex assidua carnis suggestione reservavit ad martirii coronam . . . cui enim superest pugna, superest et corona . . . Michi vero nulla superest corona quia nulla subest certaminis causa; deest materia pugne, cui ablatus est stimulus concupiscentie." This reversion by Abelard to monastic commonplaces when confronted by Heloise's pointed questions on spiritual and theological matters is later repeated in his replies to her *Problemata*.

<sup>64</sup> *Conferences*, Vol. 2, 126: "considerate quaeso illos qui corpore sunt spadones quae praecipue causa in uirtutibus adpetendis desides reddat ac tepidos. Nonne quia corrumpendae castitatis credunt

Heloise's arguments are also designed to reference Augustine's interesting ethical twist on his own confessions of sexual temptation. Having admitted to phantasmal visions, both waking and sleeping, Augustine argues that "the difference between waking and sleeping is so great that even when, during sleep, it happens otherwise, I return to a clear conscience when I wake and realize that, because of this difference, I was not responsible for the act, although I am sorry that by some means or other it happened to me."<sup>65</sup> Here his argument focuses on intention, the idea that his will is allayed while he is asleep, so that he cannot in truth consent to the visions and emissions he experiences at this time. Heloise takes this argument one step further—on the contrary, it *is* her will that she receive these visions both waking and sleeping, so that she, and her will, remain whole and consonant. She does not, therefore, like Augustine, have to adduce a divided self in order to explain her nocturnal visitations. Peter Brown writes of Augustine's plea: "[s]uch instances of the disjunction between conscious will and sexual feeling seem to betray a dislocation of the human person."<sup>66</sup> It is precisely this dislocation that Heloise abjures in writing for herself the twelfth-century ideal of the "properly composed self"—even if this means admitting to accommodating willingly nocturnal phantasms.

Patrick Geary has written of a medieval concern with memory, and particularly with how a "discarded past continued to live in the discordances, inconsistencies, and lacunae of the created past as well as in the dreams, visions, and anxieties of those who suppressed it." Geary argues that the medieval response to this state of suppression and eruption of memory was not that the past should be "forgotten altogether but rather transformed, both memorialized and commemorated so that the past might be honored, but in such a way that it might no longer control the lives of the living."<sup>67</sup> Heloise's declarations of her sexual memories in her letter to Abelard thus function in a memorializing capacity that both rejects Abelard's

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se periculum non habere?"; see also Russell, "John Cassian on a Delicate Subject," 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Confessions*, 10.30, 234; O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 1.135: "et tamen tantum interest, ut, cum aliter accidit, evigilantes ad conscientiae requiem redeamus ipsaque distantia reperiamus nos non fecisse quod tamen in nobis quoquo modo factum esse doleamus." Augustine posits a similar argument in the *De civitate Dei*, 1.25: "Quod si illa concupiscentialis inobedientia quae adhuc in membris moribundis habitat, praeter nostrae uoluntatis legem quasi lege sua mouetur, quanto magis absque culpa est in corpore non consentientis, si absque culpa est in corpore dormientis?" (If that lustful disobedience which still dwells in our mortal limbs is moved, as if in response to its own law, against the law of our own will, by how much more is guilt removed from the body of one who does not consent, if it is far from the body of one who is asleep?); Augustine, *De Civitate Dei, Books I & II*, ed. and trans. P.G. Walsh (Oxford: Aris & Phillips Classical Texts, 2005), 78, my translation.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 407.

<sup>67</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 8.

strategy of forgetting, and remains appropriate within a contemporary monastic context.

To argue from a slightly different theoretical standpoint, at the time of writing her *Ep. IV*, Heloise appears to be caught in what Kathleen Biddick has described as “melancholy” in which a trauma “resists representation since its traces recur fragmentarily in flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Past and present symptomatically fuse in such repetition, and, in so doing, the possibility of futurity—change—is foreclosed.”<sup>68</sup> Heloise is looking for this possibility of change, but this requires “the work of mourning. Mourning does not find the lost object; it acknowledges its loss, thus suffering the lost object to be lost while maintaining a narrative connection to it.”<sup>69</sup> Heloise’s memories of her past sexual relationship with Abelard, which she declares openly to him, which are marked by and upon her body, and which are not simply effaced by her external monastic habit, thus constitute an act of mourning that will allow her to access more fully and whole-heartedly her monastic future. This is a point that Abelard misses entirely in his reply to this letter, his *Ep. V*, in which he responds to Heloise’s arguments with an exegesis of the “Black but beautiful” woman of the Song of Songs (“nigra sum sed formosa,” Song of Songs 1. 4) in terms of her black exterior and white interior. In fact, where Heloise’s monastic contemporaries were approaching a new sense of self through a mystical reading of the erotics of the Song of Songs,<sup>70</sup> Heloise approaches the idea of selfhood through a genuine and lived erotics, the memory of her sexual past.

Heloise’s shocking confessions of sexuality are therefore positioned at a significant moment in the theorizing of the individual self in the twelfth century. We (post-medieval readers from the early modern period on) have been so dazzled by the sight of a medieval woman—an abbess, no less—talking about sex, that we have missed the equally dazzling theoretical innovation of what she is actually saying. Heloise here attempts to draw together the disparate discourses of monastic temptation and medieval memory theory, both of which were implicitly founded upon the standard of the male body, and sets them in conflict, forcing them to recognize and deal with a specifically female embodied persona. Sexuality and, in particular, the sexual excesses of the body constitute for Heloise a pathway into ethics: the ethics of *memoria*, and the ethics of the consonance of the interior and exterior person. Heloise’s *Ep. IV* thus participates in what Caroline Bynum has described as the twelfth-century search for the consonance of

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<sup>68</sup> Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 10.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> See Denis Renevey, *Language, Self and Love: Hermeneutics in the Writings of Richard Rolle and the Commentaries on the Song of Songs* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 1–6, 47, 50, 63.



the self with a chosen monastic model.<sup>71</sup> Heloise's "confession" does not constitute a strikingly modern autobiographical moment in which she "lays bare her soul," seeking to tell the truth of who she fundamentally is through sexual admissions; rather it marks an effort by a medieval woman to articulate an ideal of the female embodied monastic self through the contemporary twelfth-century discourses of ethics, memory, and sexuality.

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<sup>71</sup> Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?," 108.

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## Gruppensex im Untergrund: Chaotische Ketzler und kirchliche Keuschheit im Mittelalter

### Abstract

From early on the Christian Church was deeply concerned with heretics, and pursued them as harshly and violently as the Christians themselves had been pursued by the Romans before they were recognized as the official church since the early fourth century. However, in the Middle Ages the Church turned to very sophisticated propaganda strategies to identify and hunt down heretics. One of the most devious, yet also most effective propaganda tool was to claim that the heretics practiced group sex, or orgies, and hence were responsible for creating chaos in all of Christendom. Insofar as the medieval Church allowed only a very narrowly prescribed form of sexuality (within marriage, only on specific dates, only in a specific position), it proved to be highly convenient to associate all hereticism with group sex and chaos. In other words, many heretics were accused of practicing sexual rituals of the most deviant kind, involving even cannibalism, as various inquisitorial reports from throughout the Middle Ages confirm, targeting even the Cathars and the Waldensians despite their very different approach to sexuality, i.e., primarily preaching absolute abstinence. Significantly, however, this kind of sex-based religious propaganda against numerous deviant groups ultimately extended into the early modern age, then targeting alleged witches. Whether or how often there were indeed any foundations for such criticism cannot be confirmed today, though the possibility of group sex already in the Middle Ages, perhaps for religious reasons, should by no means be entirely excluded. It is most probable especially in the case of the fifteenth-century Bohemian Adamites. The really interesting question seems to be why this concept even arose in the first case and proved to be so pervasive.

Apparently, the idea of orgies that happen at night and in dark cellars or other underground spaces reflected upon revolutionary movements against the Church

authorities and so infiltrated the minds of people. Moreover, Christians projected orgiastic behavior among Muslims, especially among the Order of the Assassins, and at the same time revealed their own desire to free themselves from the super 'T' the Mother Church, to apply a Freudian concept here for the explanation of this religious-sexual phenomenon. Although the practice of having group sex, apart from gang rape, seems to have been extremely rare in the Middle Ages, its imaginary power served the Catholic Church very well to fight against deviant groups and individuals and to condemn them also in the mind of the public that was deeply indoctrinated to abhor any kind of deviant sexual practice. An orgy, as envisioned by the Church, constituted a regression to infancy because the integration into a group while in darkness removed the individual from rational self-control and consciousness and made everyone to a possible sex partner. Religious sects were hence accused of practicing group sex as a strategy to unite all adherent heretics under the group leader and thereby prepare them for breaking away from Mother Church. [AC]

In seinem Brief an den hl. Bernhard von Clairvaux klagte im Jahre 1143 Probst Everwin von Steinfeld über "die neuen Häretiker, die fast allenthalben in allen Kirchen aus dem Höllenschlund wie kochende Blasen aufsteigen, als ob sich ihr Fürst schon aufzulösen begänne und der Tag des Herrn bevorstünde: "Circumquaque jam fere per omnes Ecclesias ebuliunt [ . . . ]."<sup>1</sup> Und dreizehn Jahre später offenbarte ein Engel der hl. Elisabeth von Schönau in einer ihrer Visionen: "Viele Häresien gibt es in unseren Tagen, doch verborgen, und viele Häretiker, die im Verborgenen gegen den katholischen Glauben kämpfen und ihm viele abspenstig machen."<sup>2</sup>

Was hier zwei Zeitgenossen beobachteten, kann der Historiker rückblickend nur bestätigen: Im Bereich der europäischen Religionsgeschichte ist das durch so zahlreiche Innovationen in allen Lebensbereichen gekennzeichnete hohe Mittelalter auch jene Epoche, in der zahlreiche neue sogenannte Sekten bzw. Häresien zu vermerken sind, die von den Lehren und Praktiken der römischen Kirche wenigstens in Teilen abwichen, um einer anderen Wahrheit zu leben. Sind es in der ersten Hälfte des 11. Jahrhunderts noch kleine, lokal gebundene Gruppen, die v.a. in Frankreich auftauchen und wieder verschwinden, handelt es sich seit dem 12. Jahrhundert um teilweise wohlorganisierte Bewegungen mit zahlreichen Anhängern in verschiedenen Ländern.<sup>3</sup> Seit dieser Zeit sollte die

<sup>1</sup> Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus* (Paris: Migne 1854), 182, 677 A.

<sup>2</sup> *Liber viarum Dei* 13: Elisabeth von Schönau, *Werke*. Eingeleitet, kommentiert und übersetzt von Peter Dinzelbacher (Paderborn, München, et al.: Schöningh 2006), 123.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, "Die Achsenzeit des Hohen Mittelalters und die Ketzergeschichte," *Reformer*

Geschichte des Christentums nicht mehr alleine die der Catholica sein, sondern die der Großkirche und der von ihr abweichenden Gruppen, später Konfessionen. Wie man zueinander stand in christlicher Nächstenliebe ist bekannt genug: Mord und Totschlag auf beiden Seiten, Ketzergerichte und Glaubenskämpfe – erst die Verheerungen des unentschieden verlaufenen Dreißigjährigen Krieges sollten schließlich gegenseitige Akzeptanz erzwingen und schließlich die Konzeption der Toleranz zu einer Leitidee europäischer Humanität machen.<sup>4</sup>

Beschränken wir uns auf das hohe und späte Mittelalter, so war die Gewaltanwendung, von wenigen Ausnahmen abgesehen, regelmäßig eine Sache der Großkirche, die dazu im 13. Jahrhundert einen speziellen juristischen Apparat einrichtete, die päpstliche Inquisition, und die sich zur Vollstreckung ihrer Urteile ausgiebig des weltlichen Armes bediente.

Wir aber wollen uns hier mit einem speziellen Aspekt der Ketzerbekämpfung beschäftigen, nämlich dem didaktischen oder propagandistischen, und innerhalb dieses Themas wiederum mit den Assoziationen, die zwischen Ketzern, Sex und Chaos hergestellt wurden. Dabei geht es darum, wie die Ketzer auf Erden absichtlich ein Chaos schaffen, und zwar ein sexuelles, weswegen sie – nach katholischer Lehre – im Jenseits ebenso dem Chaos anheimfallen werden, und zwar einem sadistischen.

Seit etwa 20 Jahren, also v.a. seit dem Einwirken feministischer Konzeptionen, ist die Mittelalterforschung von einer unaufhörlichen Flut von Druckwerken zu verschiedenen Aspekten des Themas Sexualität des Mittelalters gesegnet.<sup>5</sup> Zahlreich sind die Quellen normativer Art aus diesem Bereich, von den frühmittelalterlichen Bußbüchern über die kanonistischen Sammlungen bis zur Predigt und Summenliteratur des ausgehenden Mittelalters.<sup>6</sup> Wesentlich

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als Ketzer: *Heterodoxe Bewegungen Vorreformatoren*, hg. Günter Frank und Friedrich Niewöhner. Melanchthon Schriften, 8 (Stuttgart: Frommann 2004), 91–121.

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Benz, *Beschreibung des Christentums* (München: dtv, 1975), 158–62 et passim.

<sup>5</sup> Eine ausführliche Publikation dazu bereite ich momentan vor.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Dinzelsbacher, „Mittelalterliche Sexualität. Die Quellen,“ *Privatisierung der Triebe? Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, hg. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner und Karl Vocelka. Frühneuzeit-Studien, 1 (Frankfurt a. M. und New York: Peter Lang 1994), 47–110. Es fällt auf, daß die zahlreichen jüngeren Publikationen zu Sexualität und Obszönität im Mittelalter (z.B. Ruth Marzo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. Amanda Hopkins und Cory James Rushton (Woodbridge, England, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2007), *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola F. McDonald (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press; Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), etc., das Thema i.d.R. gar nicht berühren. Für das 16. und 17. Jahrhundert finden sich einige wenige Hinweise bei Eduard Fuchs, *Illustrierte Sittengeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*. Bd. 1: *Renaissance* (München: Albert Langen, 1909), 322–24; Hans Peter Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham: Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), 313–16; Wolfgang Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität: Eine literaturpsychologische Studie über epische Dichtungen des Mittelalters*

schwieriger ist es dagegen, Verbindliches über die tatsächlich ausgeübten Praktiken zu sagen. Es genügt an dieser Stelle freilich, die bekannten (und bekanntlich zumeist bis in die Gegenwart gültigen) zentralen Normen kurz zusammenzufassen, um somit eine Folie für jenes anschließend zu beschreibende Verhalten zu erhalten, das bestimmten Ketzern in den Quellen zugeschrieben wurde.

Legitim war nach der einhelligen katholischen Lehre jener Epoche Sexualität

- ausschließlich zwischen Partnern verschiedenen Geschlechts,
- ausschließlich in einer dem kanonischen Recht entsprechenden Ehe,
- ausschließlich in jener Weise, die heute als Missionarsstellung bezeichnet wird,
- ausschließlich zum Zweck der Zeugung von Nachkommenschaft und
- ausschließlich an bestimmten Tagen (nach den mittelalterlichen Kirchengeboten war Geschlechtsverkehr mittwochs, freitags, samstags, sonntags, in den Fastenzeiten und an mehreren Festtagen verboten, desgleichen während der Menstruation und Schwangerschaft der Frau, so daß für gesetzestreue Ehepaare nur wenige Tage im Jahr erlaubt blieben).<sup>7</sup>

Inwieweit der Geschlechtsverkehr auch bei Beachtung all dieser Vorschriften trotzdem eine zumindest leichte Sünde darstellte, war allerdings unter Fachtheologen umstritten.

Andererseits quillt die religionsdidaktische Literatur seit den Kirchenvätern nur so über von Traktaten und Protreptiken immer noch unklar, die die Keuschheit prinzipiell auch der normgerechtesten Ehe bei weitem überlegen bezeichnen, im Sinne des Stoßseufzers des für das Mittelalter wichtigsten Kirchenvaters, des hl. Augustinus, in seinem Ehetraktat: "Wenn alle Menschen, sagt man, sich von jeglichem Geschlechtsverkehr enthalten würden, wie sollte dann die Menschheit weiterbestehen? Wenn das doch alle wollten! Dann würde der Gottesstaat um vieles rascher vollendet werden."<sup>8</sup>

Wenn eheliche Sexualität nun aber nicht zu vermeiden war (wie schon Paulus festgestellt hatte), so mußte sie doch gemäß der amtskirchlichen Vorstellungen von einer genauen Ordnung ausgehen, indem sie nach Zeit und Zweck, Art und Beteiligten einem präzisen Normenkatalog unterzuordnen war.

Genau das Gegenteil – und damit kommen wir vom katholischen Kosmos zum ketzerischen Chaos – betrieben, jedenfalls nach Aussagen von gefangenen Häretikern und Mitgliedern der kirchlichen Hierarchie, bestimmte Gruppen der

und der Renaissance (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1990), 408–11.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Flandrin, *Un temps pour embrasser* (Paris: Seuil, 1983). Siehe auch James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 152–75; er hat hierfür eine großartige graphische Abbildung geschaffen, die jetzt auch online einsehbar ist: <http://www.gened.arizona.edu/aclassen/Classen.pdf> (letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008)

<sup>8</sup> *De coniugali bono* 10, 10: *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Wien: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 41, 201.

mit letzteren konkurrierenden Strömungen. In seiner berühmten, um 1115 verfaßten Autobiographie berichtet Abt Guibert von Nogent von einer durch den Bischof Lisiard von Soissons durchgeführten Ketzerinquisition, an der er selbst maßgeblich beteiligt war, den folgenden Bericht: Seine Aufgabe war es, die Angehörigen der neomanichäischen Sekte zu verhören und ihrer Irrtümer zu überführen. „Ihre Konventikel,“ so schreibt der Benediktiner, „halten sie in Höhlen oder geheimen Kammern (*penetralibus*)<sup>9</sup> ab, u.zw. beide Geschlechter ohne Unterschied.<sup>10</sup> Sie zünden Kerzen an, die sie, wie es heißt, einem gewissen Weibsbild (*mulierculae*), das sich mit entblößtem Hintern nach vorne beugt, vor aller Augen von rückwärts ‘opfern’ (*a tergo offerunt*)<sup>11</sup>. Dann löschen sie rasch die Kerzen und rufen alle zusammen ‘Chaos’ in alle Richtungen (*chaos undecunque conclamant*), und ein jeder verkehrt mit der Person, die ihm gerade unter die Hand kommt.“ Wird eine Frau dabei schwanger, so wird das Kind bei einem späteren Konventikel von Hand zu Hand durch die Flammen eines großen Feuers geworfen; aus seiner Asche wird ein Brot gemacht, das jedem quasi als Eucharistie (*pro eucharistia*) zu essen gegeben wird, wodurch er oder sie der Sekte so gut wie unauflöslich verbunden bleibt. Im selben Kapitel hatte Guibert wenig zuvor betont, daß diese weit verbreiteten Ketzer nicht nur die Ehe ablehnten, also unter Partnerwechsel „die Männer den Frauen ohne Berechtigung wie Gatte und Gattin beiwohnen,“ sondern sogar „Männer mit Männer und Frauen mit Frauen schlafen, denn der Koitus eines Mannes mit einer Frau ist bei ihnen ein Unrecht.“<sup>12</sup> Wir haben hier also die Schilderung einer kultischen Orgie vor uns, ähnlich wie sie bei vielen Völkern und in zahlreichen rituellen Formen vorkommt, freilich meist mit anderer Intention, nämlich der Hebung der Fruchtbarkeit.<sup>13</sup> *Expressis verbis* wurde dabei von den französischen Häretikern das Chaos verkündet und dann sogleich auch durch blinde Promiskuität faktisch hergestellt.

Diese verbale Ausrufung des Chaos begegnet im Mittelalter, so weit mir bekannt, nur in der eben zitierten Quelle. Das rituelle Syndrom von Geheimtreffen, Promiskuität, Kindestötung und Kannibalismus dagegen zählt zu den Stereotypen der Ketzerbeschreibungen der Epoche aus der Feder katholischer Autoren.

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<sup>9</sup> Vgl. Lorenz Diefenbach, *Glossarium latino-germanicum mediae et infimae latinitatis e codicibus manuscriptis et libris impressis* (Frankfurt a. M.: Baer, 1857), 422; Albert Sleumer, *Kirchenlateinisches Wörterbuch* (1926; Hildesheim: Olms 2006), 590.

<sup>10</sup> Wie Anm 12.

<sup>11</sup> „stuprum offere“ oder „inferre,“ ‘vergewaltigen,’ ist klassisches Latein. In der mittellalterlichen Kirchensprache heißt „offere“ v.a. „opfern.“

<sup>12</sup> Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie*, ed. Edmond-René Labande (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1981), 430 (*De vita sua* 3, 17). Alle diesbezüglichen Zitate von hier.

<sup>13</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions* (Paris: Payot, 1975), 300–03 et passim.

Dieser Vorwurf wurde skurrilerweise sogar gegen die Katharer erhoben, deren Lehre gerade die Ablehnung des Geschlechtsverkehrs als einen Hauptpunkt enthielt.<sup>14</sup> Sogar einige antihäretische Schriftsteller wie Giacomo Capelli mußten zugeben, daß solche Beschuldigungen reine Verleumdung waren.<sup>15</sup> Im folgenden biete ich, ohne Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit,<sup>16</sup> einige Beispiele, Variationen des genannten Grundthemas, wie sie teilweise in den Monographien von Zacharias, Russell, Cohn und Werner behandelt worden sind.<sup>17</sup>

Während im spätrömischen und byzantinischen Reich schon Gnostiker, Paulikianer und Bogomilen dieser Untaten beschuldigt wurden, wie auch Priscillian und seine Anhänger<sup>18</sup> – die ersten von Christen als Ketzer hingerichteten Christen –, datiert das älteste bekannte Vorkommen der genannten Art innerhalb der lateinischen Christenheit des Mittelalters erst von 1022. Es handelte sich bei den damals in Orléans entdeckten Abweichlern um eine der frühesten Ketzergruppen im Westen; sie feierte eine der oben beschriebenen ähnlichen Orgien angeblich im Beisein eines Tierdämons und verwendeten die Asche der dabei gezeugten Kinder als Stärkung für die Kranken.<sup>19</sup>

Um 1180 berichtet der englische Geistliche Walter Map von 'Paterenern',<sup>20</sup> die im Dunklen einen schwarzen Kater mit Küssen verehrten und sich dann ungezügelter Sexualität hingäben. "Dicunt ecciam magistri docentque nouicios caritatem esse perfectam agere uel pati quod desiderauerit et pecierit frater aut soror, extinguere scilicet inuicem ardentes, et a paciando Paterini dicuntur."<sup>21</sup> Es sagen aber ihre Meister und belehren die Novizen, daß das vollkommene Liebe praktizieren oder empfangen heiße, was ein Bruder oder eine Schwester wünsche und erbitte, nämlich einander das brennende Verlangen auszulöschen. Diese

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1998), 110–11.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation. Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1991), 62–63.

<sup>16</sup> Vgl. weiter Jeffrey Burton Russell, *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), im Register s.v. "orgies" (389) und die Tabelle bei Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 166.

<sup>17</sup> Ernst Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1995), 18, 29, 30; Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Paladin, 1970); eingehender Russell und Windham, "A History of Witchcraft," 1–21.

<sup>18</sup> Nicole Zeddies, *Religio et sacrilegium: Studien zur Inkriminierung von Magie, Häresie und Heidentum (4.–7. Jahrhundert)*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe III: Geschichte und ihre Hilfswissenschaften, 964 (Frankfurt a. M. und New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 97; eingehender Jeffrey Russel und Mark Wyndham, "Witchcraft and the Demonization of Heresy," *Medievalia* 2 (1976): 1–21.

<sup>19</sup> Gerhard P. Zacharias, *Satanskult und Schwarze Messe* (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1964), 49–50.

<sup>20</sup> Anklang an die verketzerzte Mailänder Pataria-Bewegung.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Map, *Svaggi di corte*, ed. Fortunata Latella (Parma: Pratiche, 1990), 174 (*De nugis* 1, 30).

*caritas perfecta* ist das genaue Gegenstück zur vollkommenen Liebe, die zeitgenössische Theologen wie Bernhard von Clairvaux erst in der anderen Welt für möglich hielten und deren irdische Vorstufe sie als “*caritas ordinata*” (nach Augustinus, Ep. 243) priesen, als wohlgeordnete – natürlich asexuelle – Liebe, die sich von der Eigen- zur Nächsten- und schließlich zur Gottesliebe erhebe.<sup>22</sup>

Aus der Zeit Papst Lucius III. (1181–1185) stammt eine durchaus vertrauenswürdige Nachricht bei Caesarius von Heisterbach, nach der solche Orgien in einem finsternen Keller in Verona stattgefunden hätten; der Informant betonte ausdrücklich, er würde nicht aus religiösen Gründen teilnehmen, sondern des sexuellen Vergnügens wegen.<sup>23</sup>

Papst Gregor IX. beschuldigte 1233 (wohl auf der Basis von Informationen seines Inquisitors Konrads von Marburg, des Beichtvaters der hl. Elisabeth von Thüringen) in der für die Verbreitung des Motivs wichtigen Bulle *Vox in Rama* deutsche Abweichler ähnlicher Riten: man huldige dem in verschiedener Tiergestalt, namentlich als Kröte, erscheinenden Teufel durch Kuß auf das Hinterteil und gebe sich im Finstern den bekannten chaotischen Ausschweifung in hetero- und homosexueller Vermischung hin. Von Kindestötung und Kannibalismus ist in der Bulle jedoch keine Rede.<sup>24</sup> Solches Verhalten wurde damals u.a. den rebellischen Stedinger Bauern vorgeworfen; faktisch handelte es sich jedoch um einen regionalen Aufstand gegen den Bischof von Bremen, dessen politischer Herrschaft und Zehntforderung man entgehen wollte. Eine derartige Opposition zu unterdrücken, war am einfachsten mittels eines Kreuzzugs zu bewerkstelligen. Um den dafür notwendigen religiösen Grund angeben zu können, behauptete der Bischof, die Sektierer würden dem in der Bulle gezeichneten Ketzerstereotyp entsprechen.

Nicht zufällig bekennt ein ebenfalls um 1233 in Köln verhörter ‘Katharer’ namens Lepzet u.a. dieselben Vergehen seiner Gruppe.<sup>25</sup> Wahrscheinlich hatte man ihn mithilfe desselben Frageschemas inquiriert, das auch die Grundlage für Konrads von Marburg Bericht an den Papst geliefert hatte.

In Frankreich erzählte etwa um die gleiche Zeit eine gefangene Häretikerin dem Inquisitor Stephan von Bourbon von unterirdischen Zusammenkünften, bei denen der Sektenführer bei seinem Bart den Teufel Lucifer beschwor, der als Katze

<sup>22</sup> Pacifique Delfgaauw, “Saint Bernard, maître de l’amour divin, “ Diss. Rom 1952, 169ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Dialogus miraculorum* 5, 25, ed. Josephus Strange (Köln: J. M. Heberle, 1851); vgl. Grado Merlo, *Contro gli eretici* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1996), 55–58

<sup>24</sup> Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Krötenkuß und schwarzer Kater: Ketzerei, Götzendienst und Unzucht in der inquisitorischen Phantasie des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Warendorf: Fahlbusch, 1996), 25–39; vgl. Zacharias, *Satanskult*, 52–55.

<sup>25</sup> Hergemöller, *Krötenkuß*, 39–58.



erschien und alle Lichter auslöschte. Danach vermischten sich alle Männer und Frauen schändlich und ohne Ansehens des Geschlechts.<sup>26</sup>

In den sechziger Jahren des 13. Jahrhunderts gründete Gerhard Segarelli in Parma eine Sekte, die sich selbst in Konkurrenz zu den Franziskanern als „minimi“ bezeichnete und deren Armuts- und Imitatio Christi-Ideale sich? ins Extreme übersteigerte. Um „nackt dem nackten Christus“ folgen zu können, pflogen sie den folgenden Ritus, der ebenfalls in einem bewußten Durcheinander freilich harmloserer Art bestand: Nachdem die Mitglieder ihren Führer mit dem hundertfachen Ruf „Pater, pater, pater“ verehrt hatten, „entblößte er sich und alle andern so, daß auch die Genitalien ohne Hosen oder andere Kleidung nackt waren. Und sie standen nackt im Kreis umher, an die Mauer gelehnt, aber nicht in geordneter Reihe (*non in acie ordinata*), oder anständig und gut . . . . Jeder von ihnen hatte nämlich nach dem Geheiß des Meisters seine Kleidung mitten im Hause von sich weg zusammengelegt. Als sie so schamlos standen, wurde auf Befehl des Meisters eine Frau hereingeführt, das Haupt der Sünde, die Waffe des Teufels . . . .“ Doch kommt es nun keineswegs zu den gewohnten Exzessen, vielmehr hatte diese nur „den so besitzlos gemachten und des Eigenen entblößten Armen die Kleider zuzuteilen, wie sie wollte . . . .“<sup>27</sup> Segarelli wurde im Jahre 1300 verbrannt, sein Erbe trat der wesentlich gefährlichere Fra Dolcino an.

Die wenig später erfolgten Prozesse zur Vernichtung des Templerordens gehören übrigens nicht in diese Reihe, da in ihnen zwar geheim gehaltene Homosexualität ein Anklagepunkt war, nicht aber eine rituelle Sexorgie.<sup>28</sup>

Der Inquisitionsbericht von 1315 aus dem niederösterreichischen Krems erwähnt ebenfalls eine solche Zusammenkunft, bei der sogar „eine Homosexuellenhochzeit unter Zwillingsgeschwistern abgelaufen“ sein soll.<sup>29</sup>

1324/1325 kam es zu einem der ersten authentischen Hexenprozesse in Europa und zur ersten Ketzerverfolgung in Irland überhaupt: Die ca. sechzigjährige Lady Alice Kyteler wurde von ihren Stiefkindern wegen Erbschaftsstreitigkeiten der Zauberei bezichtigt; sie habe einen tiergestaltigen Dämon als Incubus gehabt und nächtliche Konventikel abgehalten. Dabei wurden die Kerzen ausgeblasen und mit

<sup>26</sup> *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon*, ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche (Paris: Renouard, 1877), 323.

<sup>27</sup> Salimbene de Adam, *Chronica* a.a. 1248, ed. Giuseppe Scalia. *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio mediaevalis*, CXXV, 1 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1998), 402.

<sup>28</sup> Hergemöller, *Krötenkuß*, 330–405; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Die Templer: Ein geheimnisumwitterter Orden?*. Herder spektrum, 4805 (Freiburg: Herder, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Ernst Englisch, „Die Ambivalenz in der Beurteilung sexueller Verhaltensweisen im Mittelalter,“ *Privatisierung der Triebe?*, 167–86; hier 172 (nach Peter Segl, „Ketzer in Österreich,“ wie Anm. 66, 304).

dem Ruf "fi, fi, fi, amen" begann eine sexuelle Orgie – so eine allerdings erst nach Auspeitschung erfolgte Aussage einer ihrer Vertrauten.<sup>30</sup>

1328 berichtet der zeitgenössische, allerdings geographisch weit ab liegende Franziskaner Johannes von Winterthur von Kölner Ketzern, "die sich nachts in unterirdischen Räumen nackt Ausschweifungen ergaben und das Paradies gleichsam verkörperten."<sup>31</sup> Und zu 1339 erzählt derselbe Autor von drei Konstanzer Beginen, mit denen ein Ketzer gemeinsam Sex gehabt habe, wobei er sie als Inkarnationen der Trinität auffaßte. Dies ist zugleich einer der ganz wenigen mittelalterlichen Belege für sadistischen Sex (Fesselung) und visuelle Erregung (Betrachtung der Geschlechtsteile).<sup>32</sup>

Und der auch nicht näherstehende Kärntner Johannes von Viktring erklärt, ein "dämonischer Priester," der sich für Christus hielt und glaubte, er werde am dritten Tage nach seiner Verbrennung wiederauferstehen, habe diese adamtische Sekte geleitet. Nicht nur sexuelle Orgien, sondern auch Tanz und Schmausereien hätten ihre Mitglieder glauben lassen, sie könnten den Paradieseszustand wiederherstellen.<sup>33</sup> Was die Schweidnitzer Schwestern (um 1332) in ihrem Keller getrieben haben, erregte zumindest ähnliche Verdächtigungen,<sup>34</sup> und in der Bettelordenskritik finden sich auch entsprechende Anspielungen.<sup>35</sup>

Gerson und andere erwähnen die besonders in Südostfrankreich in der 2. Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts verbreiteten Turlupinen, eine freigeistig-begardische Häresie, die jede Ordnung prinzipiell verwarf, da sie im Besitz des Heiligen Geistes von allen menschlichen und göttlichen Gesetzen befreit sei, weshalb man sich u.a. dem Geschlechtsverkehr in aller Öffentlichkeit hingab.<sup>36</sup> Ähnliche Konsequenzen zogen freigeistige Sekten fast immer, da sie glaubten, der Heilige Geist, also Gott, sei mit ihnen vereint und sie damit als gottgleich jeder moralischen oder ethischen Norm enthoben.<sup>37</sup> Im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert wird die rituelle Orgie im Dunklen auch

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<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca und London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 189–93; Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (Paladin: St Albans, 1976), 198–204; *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), Bd. III, 613–15.

<sup>31</sup> Ernst Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1995), 470.

<sup>32</sup> *Monumenta Germaniae historica SS rer. Germ.* NS 3, 249.

<sup>33</sup> *Liber certarum historiarum* 5, 6, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, SS rer Germ i.u.s. 36/2, 129–30.

<sup>34</sup> Albert Hauck, *Kirchengeschichte Deutschlands*. Bd. V, 1, 5. Aufl. (1896–1920; Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1953), 414–15.

<sup>35</sup> Englisch, *Die Ambivalenz*, 174–75.

<sup>36</sup> Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft*, 471; *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*. Bd. 15, 2 (Paris: Letouzey 1950), Sp. 193.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Dinkelbacher, *Christliche Mystik im Abendland* (Paderborn, München et al.: Schöningh, 1994), 455 Register s.v. 'Freie Geister.'

in Inquisitionsprotokollen gegen die Waldenser des Piemont erwähnt.<sup>38</sup> Die in Belgien beheimateten "homines intelligentiae" von 1410/1411 gingen in ähnliche Richtung, indem sich die weiblichen Angehörigen jedem Mann zu jeder Zeit an jedem Ort hingaben.<sup>39</sup> Die körperliche Liebe qualifizierten sie als dem Gebet gleichwertigen religiösen Akt.<sup>40</sup> Ein Karmelitermönch, der dieser Sekte angehört hatte, Willem van Hildernissem, berichtete (ohne Details) über eine besondere Art des Sexualverkehrs, der wie der Adams im Paradies gewesen und "Paradieseslust" genannt worden sei.<sup>41</sup> Punktuell dürften auch Ordenshäuser solche Szenen gesehen haben; eine Nachricht über schreckliche ketzerische Verbrechen mehrerer Brüder und Schwestern im venezianischen Kloster Santa Maria dei Francescani, unter denen Sodomie und Inzest genannt werden,<sup>42</sup> scheint in diese Richtung zu deuten.

Relativ ausführliche Nachrichten haben wir über eine radikale Splittergruppe der böhmischen Hussiten, die Adamiten. Sie gründeten 1420 auf einer Insel in der Luschnitz und in der Umgebung Gemeinden, die das endzeitliche Paradies wiederherzustellen versuchten. Dazu gehörte Güterkommunismus, Freiheit von Herrschaft und völlige soziale Gleichheit (kein Unterschied nach Herkunft oder Geschlecht, Auflösung bestehender Ehen), was ausgedrückt wurde durch die Nacktheit der Männer und Frauen. Die umliegenden hussitischen bzw. katholischen Dörfer, in deren Priestern sie Verkörperungen Satans erkannten, überfielen sie, um alle Ärgernis aus dem Königreich Gottes auszutreiben. Das Ende dieser chiliastischen Sekte kam in der Tat rascher, als sie es wohl erwartet hatte: Der hussitische Heerführer Jan Zizka, der schon das Kreuzzugsheer Kaiser Sigismunds geschlagen hatte, vernichtete mit Feuer und Schwert die Adamiten am 21. Oktober 1421.

Ihr Kult sah nach zeitgenössischen Berichten folgendermaßen aus: "Alle Männer und Weiber entkleideten sich und tanzten um ein Feuer; hatte ein Mann einen Lendenschurz um, rissen ihn die Weiber ab, indem sie sagten: Verlasse dein Gefängnis, gib mir deinen Geist und empfang den meinen, worauf jeder mit jeder und jede mit jedem sündigte. Vorher verletzten oder verbrannten sie sich in sodomitischer Gier. Eine derartige Tat nannten sie göttliche Liebe und göttlichen

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<sup>38</sup> Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1998), 164; Werner Tschacher, *Der Formicarius des Johannes Nider von 1437/38: Studien zu den Anfängen der europäischen Hexenverfolgung im Spätmittelalter* (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2000), 298–99.

<sup>39</sup> Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft*, 463.

<sup>40</sup> Russell, *Witchcraft*, 224.

<sup>41</sup> *Corpus documentorum Inquisitionis hereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae: Verzameling van stukken betreffende de pauselijke en bisschoppelijke inquisitie in de Nederlanden*, Bd. I, hg. Paul Frédéricq (Gent: J. Vuylsteke, 1889), 266–67.

<sup>42</sup> Guido Ruggiero, *I confini dell'eros: Crimini sessuali e sessualità nella Venezia del Rinascimento* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1988), 238.

Willen. Zum Schluß badeten sie im Fluß. So mordeten sie nachts und trieben tags Unzucht.“<sup>43</sup> Nicht nur homo- und heterosexuelle Promiskuität prägten das Leben der Sekte, sondern auch Pädophilie, indem alle Mädchen von ihr beitretenen Familien, auch die allerjüngsten, defloriert wurden.

1466 wurden in Assisi Fraticellen festgenommen (so wurden Angehörige verschiedener devianter Gruppen genannt, die sich tatsächlich oder angeblich aus den auf radikaler Armut bestehenden und daher von der Amtskirche verfolgten Franziskanern entwickelten). Sie gaben, freilich teilweise unter der Folter, an, sie würden nach der Meßfeier an einem profanen Ort in der Dunkelheit promiskuer Sexualität huldigen. Dabei „geschah ein solches Getöse mit den Füße, als ob es Karfreitag gewesen wäre.“<sup>44</sup> Auch die Ermordung und Verbrennung eines Knaben zur Zubereitung der Eucharistie wurde teilweise zugegeben, teilweise abgestritten. Bemerkenswert ist der Vergleich mit der Karfreitagsliturgie: In den mittelalterlichen Kirchen (aber auch noch in neuzeitlichen) war es wenigstens seit dem 13. Jahrhundert üblich, bei der Rumpel- oder Pumpermette einen großen Tumult zu erregen, der den Verräter Judas verjagen und das Lärmen bei der Gefangennahme Jesu darstellten sollte.<sup>45</sup>

Chaotisches Treiben mit hetero- und homosexuellem Verkehr gehörte dann auch zum Stereotyp des spätmittelalterlichen und neuzeitlichen Hexensabbats. Sein Wesen ist das einer schwarzen Messe, bei der die christliche pervertiert wird.<sup>46</sup> Chaotisch geht es freilich auch hier zu; nach dem Traktat *Errores Gazariorum* (um 1440), einem Handbuch für Inquisitoren, werden nach dem Tanz beim Hexensabbat vom Teufel die Lichter gelöscht und seine Adepten mit dem Ruf „Mestlet“ (vermischt euch) zur schrankenlosen Promiskuität aufgerufen, bei der auch jede Form von Inzest erwünscht ist.<sup>47</sup> Ich begnüge mich damit, nur noch eine der ältesten Schilderungen zu zitieren, die des Apostolischen Protonotars Martin le Franc († 1461). In seinem *Champion des dames* heißt es, beim Abschluß des Sabbats „ergreift ein jeder die Seinige, und damit keine Frau ohne Mann bleibe, kommt ein Teufel über sie. Dann kehrt ein jeder wie der Wind auf seinem Besenstiel nach Hause zurück . . .“.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft*, 423–24 (gekürzt).

<sup>44</sup> Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft*, 496.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, *Judastraditionen*. Raabser Märchen-Reihe, 2 (Wien: Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde, 1977), 41–42.

<sup>46</sup> Zacharias, *Satanskult* 55–105; Carlo Ginzburg, *Hexensabbat. Entzifferung einer nächtlichen Geschichte* (1989; Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1990); Peter Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit* (Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 1995 u.ö.); *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*, hg. Golden, Bd. IV, 987–92.

<sup>47</sup> Tschacher, *Der Formicarius des Johannes Nider*, 324.

<sup>48</sup> *L'imaginaire du sabbat: édition critique des textes les plus anciens, 1430 c.–1440 c.*, ed. Martine Ostorero, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani und Kathrin Utz Tremp (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne 1999), 457.

Schließlich sei noch erwähnt, daß auch auf Ketzer der Zukunft, nämlich die Anhänger des Antichrist, der Vorwurf sexueller, orgiastischer Promiskuität übertragen wurde: In Berufung auf das *Compendium Theologiae* des Hugo Ripelin von Straßburg OP heißt es in einem Blockbuch mit der Antichrist-Legende, daß seine Diener nach seinem Tode 25 Tage lang "leben den suntlich und noch lust des leibs."<sup>49</sup> Die Holzschnitt-Illustration dazu zeigt ein Gelage mit einander liebkosenden Paaren, Musik und einem bellenden Hund (wohl Anspielung auf Mt 7, 6).

Die obenstehenden Ausführungen basieren allein auf schriftlichen Quellen. Denn es gibt m.W. nur eine Abbildung des erotischen Chaos beim Treffen der genannten Häretiker: Während in Handschriften der seit ca. 1220 entstehenden *Bible moralisée* der Kuß auf den Anus des Katers mehrfach dargestellt wurde (z.B. Codex Vindobonensis 1179, f. 203 v), zeigt anscheinend nur die Oxforder Handschrift Bodleian 270b, f. 123 v, auch die Umarmungen von zwei (noch züchtig bekleideten) Ketzer-Gruppen, wobei die die Sünde der Sodomie illustrierende Szene auch gleichgeschlechtliche Paare zeigt.<sup>50</sup> Der ungelösten Frage, ob wir in Hieronymus Boschs' Garten der Lüste eine solche Orgie sehen können, werde ich nicht nachgehen, denn es scheint doch so, als ob Fraengers diesbezügliche Theorie der Kritik nicht standgehalten hat.<sup>51</sup> Doch ist eine detaillierte Ikonographie der Ketzer, Zauberer und Hexen in der Kunst des Mittelalters überhaupt noch ein Desiderat.<sup>52</sup>

Nur *in margine* sei angemerkt, daß eine Interpretation der Bildquellen entsprechender ikonographischer Kenntnisse bedarf; wenn z.B. ein nackter König mit zwei nackten Frauen im Bett gezeigt wird,<sup>53</sup> so handelt es sich nicht um Gruppensex, sondern um eine synchronoptische Darstellung des alttestamentlichen Königs und Propheten David, der als Heiliger verehrt wurde und wird, mit seinen beiden Frauen (1Sam 25, 42f.). Allerdings gestehen ihm die mittelalterlichen Auftraggeber und Künstler in dieser Szene nicht den Nimbus zu, den er auf Einzelbildern trägt. Auch die Anwesenheit mehrerer Personen in Badestuben zielt nicht auf Gruppensex, sondern illustriert konventionelle Bade- und Bordellsituationen.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Raoul Vaneigem, *Il movimento del libero spirito* (Torino: Nautilus, 1995); Abb. ohne Nummer.

<sup>50</sup> Hergemöller, *Krötenkuß*, 148–56.

<sup>51</sup> Wilhelm Fraenger, *Hieronymus Bosch: Das tausendjährige Reich, Grundzüge einer Auslegung* (Coburg: Winkler Verlag 1947). Zuletzt Larry Silver, *Hieronymus Bosch* (München: Hirmer, 2006), 29.

<sup>52</sup> Einen ersten Versuch präsentierte Wolfgang Schild, *Die Maleficia der Hexenleut'* (Rothenburg o. d. T.: Schriftenreihe des Mittelalterlichen Kriminalmuseums, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> Cambridge Univ. Libr. Ms Ee. 2,23, f. 98r, 14. Jh. Der beigeschriebene Text ist 3 Kön 1,1: Dinzelbacher, *Sexualität*, 83.

<sup>54</sup> Siehe hierzu den Beitrag zu diesem Band von Gertrud Blaschitz.

Bemerkenswerterweise galten ursprünglich eben dieselben Vorwürfe chaotischer Unzucht gerade dem Christentum, ehe es erlaubte und dann Staatsreligion geworden war. Einer der ältesten Apologeten, der in der 1. Hälfte des 3. Jahrhunderts schreibende Minucius Felix, hat in seinem *Octavius* (9–10) detailliert die von Heiden vertretene Meinung wiedergegeben, daß der Initiand dieses Mysterienkultes ein Kind erstechen müsse, das dann rituell verzehrt werde. An ihren Festtagen "kommen sie mit allen ihren Kindern, Schwestern, Müttern zusammen, Leute beiderlei Geschlechts und jedes Alters."<sup>55</sup> Hat man sich genügend betrunken, beginnt die Orgie, indem ein an den Lampenständer gebundener Hund, nach Futter springend, diesen umwirft und somit das Licht verlöscht. "Dann, in der Dunkelheit, die schamloses Verhalten so begünstigt, verdoppeln sie die Bande unaussprechlicher Leidenschaften, wie es der Zufall ergibt. Und so betreiben alle gleicherweise Inzest, wenn auch nicht immer faktisch, so doch als Mittäter, denn alles, was von einem von ihnen getrieben wird, entspricht den Wünschen von ihnen allen . . ."<sup>56</sup> Christen wie Epiphanius von Salamis († 403), der es wissen musste, da er selbst vor seiner Bekehrung an solchen Handlungen teilgenommen hatte, beschuldigten ihrerseits Gnostiker, speziell die Fibioniten bzw. Barbeloiten, der rituellen Promiskuität, Spermakommunion und Abtreibung.<sup>57</sup>

Diese und ähnliche Nachrichten können verschieden interpretiert werden. Manche Historiker wie Norman Cohn oder Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller halten sie durchgehend für ohne reale Grundlagen konstruierte Feindbilder, die als Mittel der Stigmatisierung von ihren jeweiligen Gegnern über die genannten Gruppen verbreitet wurden. Es handle sich bloß um einen literarischen Topos, der sich wenigstens bis zur negativen Schilderung des Bacchuskultes durch Livius zurückführen lasse, dann von den heidnische Römern auf die jüdische Geheimsekte der Christen übertragen worden wäre und von diesen auf die mit ihnen konkurrierenden Gnostiker und schließlich, nach der Etablierung der katholischen Kirche als Trägerin der Staatsreligion von ihr als beliebtes Ketzerstereotyp weitergebraucht worden wäre.<sup>58</sup>

Andere Forscher, wie Gerhard Zacharias und, vorsichtiger, Ernst Werner, sind der Ansicht, daß hier eine tatsächliche praktizierte Tradition existierte, die nur punktuell von Zeit zu Zeit wieder einmal aufgedeckt wurde.<sup>59</sup> Natürlich gibt es die *Möglichkeit* esoterischer Traditionen, zu denen der Historiker aber wenig sagen kann, da solche *ipso facto* quellenmäßig nicht in Kontinuität nachzuweisen sind. So

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/minucius.html> (letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>56</sup> *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Bd. 2 (Turnhout: Brepols 1954); M. Minucius Felix, *Octavius*. Lateinisch und deutsch, hg. Bernhard Kytzler (Stuttgart: Reclam 1977).

<sup>57</sup> Zacharias, *Satanskult*, 29–30.

<sup>58</sup> Wie Anm. 29 und 30.

<sup>59</sup> Wie Anm. 18 und 31.

ist jeder Fall im einzelnen zu prüfen; die Umstände (die hier nicht ausgebreitet werden können) sprechen etwa bei den Ketzern von Orléans oder den Stedingern in der Tat dafür, daß diese Gruppen absichtlich mit einem aus der Tradition der Ketzergeschichte entlehnten Vergehen belastet wurden, dessen sie faktisch wahrscheinlich keineswegs schuldig waren,<sup>60</sup> wogegen es keinen überzeugenden Grund gibt, die Überlieferungen etwa über die Häretiker von Soissons oder die Adamiten in Zweifel zu ziehen.

Doch wollen wir hier nicht die stringent ohnehin nicht lösbaren Probleme der historischen Quellenkritik diskutieren, sondern nur vom u.E. Wahrscheinlichsten ausgehen, nämlich daß eine Reihe von Sekten tatsächlich solche Riten praktizierte, eine andere dagegen mit dem entsprechenden Klischee bloß von ihren Verfolgern belastet wurde. Jedenfalls gab es auch in der Neuzeit Sekten, bei denen kein Zweifel an ihren promiskuen Praktiken möglich ist, z.B. die radikal-kommunistischen Oneida Perfectionists von John Humphrey Noyes (1811–1886),<sup>61</sup> nach dessen "complex marriage" genanntem System sich jeder Mann und jede Frau der Gruppe als Ehepartner zu betrachten hatte (doch ohne Orgien).

Es ist jedoch zu fragen, welcher religionsphänomenologische und psychologische Sinn hinter dieser Art von Orgien stehen könnte. Rufen wir uns dazu nochmals die wesentlichen Komponenten der Riten ins Gedächtnis, die von fast allen erwähnten Sekten berichtet wurden: Der zentrale Bestandteil war die Schaffung eines Chaos durch wahllosen Geschlechtsverkehr, wobei jede verhaltensbiologisch vorgegebene und sozial erworbene Beschränkung absichtlich durchbrochen wurde: Inzest, Pädophilie und Homosexualität heißen die die Betrachter so schockierenden Tabubrüche. Sie müssen in einer Epoche, in der die kirchlichen Gebote für die meisten Menschen existentielle Gültigkeit besessen haben, noch wesentlich schockierender gewesen sein als für heutige Betrachter mit i.d.R. ganz anderer Grundeinstellung sowohl zum Thema Sexualität als auch zu Normen generell. In vielen Fällen werden diese Anschuldigungen mit der des Satanismus oder Luciferismus verbunden, dessen Realität für das Mittelalter ebenfalls von manchen Historikern wie Segl bestritten wird,<sup>62</sup> von anderen wie Zacharias und dem Verfasser dieser Zeilen dagegen für durchaus wahrscheinlich gehalten wird,<sup>63</sup> wenn auch als punktuelles Phänomen und nicht als organisierte Sekte, zumal einzelne Fälle wie der des Gilles de Rais<sup>64</sup> Teufelsbeschwörungen aktenmäßig

<sup>60</sup> Wofür m.E. besonders spricht, daß David von Augsburg, der Gefährte des berühmten Predigers Berthold von Regensburg, schreibt, er habe nie Glaubwürdiges über solche Orgien in Erfahrung bringen können: Hergemöller, *Krötenkuß*, 288.

<sup>61</sup> Hasting's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Bd. III (Edinburgh: Clark 1910), 785–86.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Segl, "Luciferianer," 1084.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, *Handbuch der Religionsgeschichte im deutschsprachigen Raum*. Bd. II: *Hoch- und Spätmittelalter* (Paderborn, München et al.: Schöningh, 2000), 547 (Register s.v. ).

<sup>64</sup> Philippe Reliquet, *Ritter, Tod und Teufel: Gilles de Rais oder die Magie des Bösen* (1982; München :

belegen, ganz abgesehen von den aus dem Spätmittelalter überlieferten, nachweislich benützten Handschriften für schwarzmagische Praktiken.<sup>65</sup>

War es also gemäß all dieser Berichte regellose Sexualität, die Chaos schuf, so traten auch andere Faktoren gleicher Intention hinzu. Sehr häufig wird Dunkelheit hergestellt, bisweilen werden Gegenstände umgestürzt oder wird Kleidung durcheinandergeworfen. Vielfach ist von unterirdischen Räumen die Rede, in denen das Ungeheuerliche geschehe; dies scheint vielleicht nicht nur der Geheimhaltung wegen so gewesen zu sein, sondern in der Vorstellung der Beteiligten eine Annihilation etwa doch zu befürchtender Sündhaftigkeit bewirkt zu haben. Denn eine 1315 in Krems (Niederösterreich) verbrannte, den Waldensern nahestehende Ketzerin sagte aus, über der Erde sei sie Jungfrau, unter der Erde dagegen nicht, wozu Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts der Abt Johannes Trithemius von Sponheim bemerkte, diese Häretiker meinten, „Jungfrauen könnten unter der Erde nicht defloriert werden, auch wenn sie von tausend Männern erkannt würden.“<sup>66</sup> So ließ sich freilich auch für noch nicht ganz deviante Gewissen ein geordnetes Leben in der Alltagswelt mit einem orgiastischen im Untergrund verbinden.

Wie ist das Phänomen aus Sicht der Religionsphänomenologie zu interpretieren? In seiner bekannten Studie über den Mythos der ewigen Wiederkehr hat Mircea Eliade an reichhaltigem Material dargelegt, wie in vielen Kulturen das Bedürfnis besteht, zu bestimmtem, sich zyklisch wiederholenden Zeitpunkten die abgelaufene Geschichte mit ihren kultischen Verfehlungen durch bestimmte Zeremonien zu vernichten und damit eine ganz reine, neue Ära zu beginnen. „Kollektiv oder individuell, periodisch oder sporadisch, die Regenerationsriten schließen in ihrer Struktur und Bedeutsamkeit immer ein Element der Regeneration durch Wiederholung eines archetypischen Aktes ein, zumeist des kosmogonischen Aktes“ ein.<sup>67</sup> Vor der Schöpfung steht aber nach vielen Mythologien, auch der biblischen, das Chaos. Die römischen Saturnalien und der Karneval sind die uns wohl am besten bekannten rituellen Herstellungen einer Zeitphase, welche das Gegenteil zum (theoretisch) wohlgeordneten sonstigen Alltag darstellt. „L’homme régresse provisoirement à l’état amorphe, nocturne, du chaos, pour pouvoir renaître avec plus de vigueur dans sa forme diurne.“<sup>68</sup> Eliade

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Artemis, 1990).

<sup>65</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*. Magic in History (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 1978).

<sup>66</sup> Peter Segl, *Ketzer in Österreich: Untersuchungen über Häresie und Inquisition im Herzogtum Österreich im 13. und beginnenden 14. Jahrhundert* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1984), 301–32.

<sup>67</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Kosmos und Geschichte. Der Mythos der ewigen Wiederkehr* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1966), 46–79.

<sup>68</sup> Eliade, *Traité d'histoire des religions*, 302.



hat übrigens in einem späteren, wenig bekannten Aufsatz den Zusammenhang zwischen den häretischen und den kosmogonischen Riten selbst hergestellt.<sup>69</sup>

Bemerkenswerterweise beschreibt auch die eigentlich naturwissenschaftliche Chaostheorie mit dem Begriff Emergenz<sup>70</sup> die Entstehung neuer geordneter Systeme aus einer chaotischen Phase heraus, so daß auch in dem hier diskutierten sozialen Verhalten möglicherweise eine ganz universelle Struktur zu Tage tritt. In der 'Rekonstruktion' des Chaos durch die Ketzer kann man jedoch kaum wie bei den von Eliade herangezogenen religionsgeschichtlichen Parallelen von einer Vorbereitungsphase zu einer erneuerten Normalität sprechen. Vielmehr war ihre Intention, wo sie denn wirklich nach der Herstellung von Dunkelheit wahllos sexueller Promiskuität huldigte, die der Etablierung einer neuen Gesellschaft, die eine tendenziell permanente Gegenstruktur zur Ordnung der Catholica verkörpern sollte. "Man wollte sich selbst und anderen sichtbar und drastisch beweisen, daß ein neues Saeculum angebrochen war, das eine Umwertung aller Werte zur Voraussetzung und Folge hatte."<sup>71</sup> Erst die Zerstörung aller hergebrachten Ordnung, am prägnantesten und provokativsten durch schrankenlosen Libertinismus zum Ausdruck gebracht, machte den Anbruch einer neuen Ära, eines neuen Äon, konkret sichtbar (weshalb man etwa auch die Altäre durch Geschlechtsverkehr auf ihnen entweihte).<sup>72</sup> Schon Friedrich Engels stellte zweifellos treffend fest, "daß mit jeder großen revolutionären Bewegung die Frage der 'freien Liebe' in den Vordergrund tritt; bei einem Teil der Menschen als ein revolutionärer Fortschritt, als ein Abwerfen nicht mehr notwendiger, alter traditioneller Fesseln, bei anderen als eine willkommene Lehre, die bequemerweise alle Arten zügelloser Handlungen zwischen Mann und Frau deckt."<sup>73</sup> Trotzdem scheint unverkennbar, daß hier die Nacktheit der Sektenmitglieder nicht nur eine erotische, sondern auch eine sakrale Nacktheit war, wie sie aus so vielen anderen Kulturen bekannt ist.

Daß dieser Libertinismus wie manche andere sozial-revolutionäre Strömungen im Mittelalter nicht anders denn als Religionsform auftreten konnte, bedarf wohl keiner weiteren Erläuterungen. Religiosität könnte man als prägende Verhaltensform der Menschen jener Epoche bezeichnen; unsere Kategorisierung in hier Soziales und dort Religiöses wäre den meisten von ihnen wahrscheinlich

<sup>69</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Der magische Flug. Aufsatzsammlung* (Sinzheim: AAGW, 2000), 101–29. Ohne Kenntnis dieser Interpretation sprach Hergemöller, *Krötenkuß*, 166–67, davon, die Ketzer hätten in die Präexistenz zurückkehren und eine Wiedervereinigung der androgynen Ureinheit herstellen wollen, freilich ohne nachzuweisen, daß dieser von Plato herkommende Mythos irgendwelchen mittelalterlichen Häretikern auch nur bekannt gewesen sei.

<sup>70</sup> *Emergenz: Die Entstehung von Ordnung, Organisation und Bedeutung*, hg. Wolfgang Krohn und Günther Küppers. Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 984 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992).

<sup>71</sup> Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft*, 435.

<sup>72</sup> Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft*, 458.

<sup>73</sup> Zitiert nach Werner, *Religion und Gesellschaft*, 501–02.

unverständlich gewesen, da diese ein gelebtes Ganzes bildeten. Was wurde da aber kurzzeitig verwirklicht? Ohne andere Elemente auszuschließen: eine Utopie der Freiheit von allen Zwängen des gesellschaftlichen Herkommens und der verordneten Religion. Daß diese Utopie rückwärtsgewandt sein konnte, wie bei den Turlupinen, die das Modell des Paradieses vor Augen hatten, ist eine prinzipiell häufig übliche Formulierung von Utopien.<sup>74</sup> Schuf man also ein erotisches Schlaraffenland,<sup>75</sup> um einen anderen spätmittelalterlichen Traum zu vergleichen?

Nein, denn abgesehen von den "homines intelligentiae" und den (vielleicht auf sie zurückgehenden) Adamiten kamen auch all die aufgezählten Sekten nicht ohne rituelle Bindung ihrer orgiastischen Sexualität aus. Denn nur bei den festgesetzten Treffen und nur unter Beachtung eines bestimmten Ritus durfte sich diese ausleben. Und ob homosexuelle Betätigungen wirklich zu den erotischen Wunschphantasien der meisten Beteiligten gehörten, darf man angesichts der ungemein häufigeren heterosexuellen Prägung durchaus bezweifeln. Die Beliebigkeit auch der heterosexuellen Kontakte wird ebenso nicht unbedingt das Ideal jedes und jeder Beteiligten gewesen sein. Hier scheint die religiöse Ideologie, der Zwang zum Chaos, wesentlich wichtiger gewesen zu sein als irgendwelche persönliche Neigungen.

Warum war gerade dieses Verhalten in katholischen Augen derartig verwerflich, daß es sich offenbar besonders gut als Propagandamittel gegen die genannten devianten Gruppen eignete? Es scheint, daß das Mittelalter Gruppensex<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Weder Hilário Franco, *As utopias medievais* (Sao Paulo: Editora brasiliense, 1992), noch Claude Thomasset und Danièle James-Raoul, ed., *En Quête d'utopies. Cultures et civilisations médiévales*, 29 (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2005), beziehen häretische bzw. sexuelle Utopien ein. Zu "Sexualutopien in der deutschen Reformation" vgl. den gleichnamigen Aufsatz von Lyndal Roper in: *Ordnung und Lust: Bilder von Liebe, Ehe und Sexualität in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, hg. Hans-Jürgen Bachorski. Literatur – Imagination – Realität. Anglistische, germanistische, romanistische Studien, 1 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag 1991), 307–36.

<sup>75</sup> In den eigentlichen Beschreibungen des Schlaraffenlandes spielten sexuelle Phantasien im Gegensatz zu Klima, Essen und Trinken nur eine marginale Rolle, vgl. Herman Pliij, *Dromen van Cocagne. Middelleeuwse fantasieën over het volmaakte leven* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1997), Register s.v. 'seks' (541). Am deutlichsten ist hier wohl die mittellenglische Verssatire, *The Land of Cockayne*, ed. Margherita Lecco, in: *Incroci di lingue e di culture nell'Inghilterra medievale*, a cura di Gian Carlo Belletti. Scrittura e scrittori: Serie monografica, 11 (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'orso, 1994), 89–110.

<sup>76</sup> Bemerkenswerterweise fehlt das Thema in dem Band: *Sexuelle Perversionen im Mittelalter: XXIX. Jahrestagung des Arbeitskreises "Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters"*, Brugge, Belgien, 22.–25. September 1994, hg. Danielle Buschinger und Wolfgang Spiewok. Wodan, 46 (Greifswald: Reineke, 1994) völlig. Nicht eingesehen habe ich Burgo Partridge, *A History of Orgies* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1960), das jedoch nach Joyce E. Salisbury, *Medieval Sexuality: A Research Guide* (New York: Garland, 1990), 108, ohnehin belanglos ist. Ob die Insel der Frauen der altirischen Mythologie mit solchen Vorstellungen verbunden war (Howard Patch, *The Other World According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature*. Smith College Studies in Modern Language. New Series, 1

überhaupt nicht kannte oder wenigstens als Möglichkeit bewußt phantasierte, sondern ausschließlich im häretischen (und exotischen) Bereich vermutete. Anders die römische Antike, wo es nicht nur kultische Orgien gab, sondern auch gemeinschaftliche Erotik, die allenfalls als nicht gerade anständig galt, aber nicht tabuisiert oder verboten war.<sup>77</sup> Anders auch als in der Renaissance, wo die kollektiven Paarungsspiele am Hofe Papst Alexanders VI. unter der Regie seiner Tochter Lucrezia mit Preisvergaben für die aktivsten Teilnehmer endeten.<sup>78</sup> Gelegentlich dürften aber doch Mitglieder des Adels mit entsprechenden Möglichkeiten auch zuvor auf solche Ideen gekommen sein, wie anscheinend Albrecht III. Achilles von Brandenburg.<sup>79</sup> Handlungsmäßig, nicht aber der Intention und dem Umfeld nach, könnte man noch an jene v.a. in England bei Scheidungsverfahren wegen Impotenz üblichen Vorgehensweise denken, bei denen mehrere vom Gericht beauftragte Frauen versuchten, durch visuelle und durchaus handfeste taktile Reize festzustellen, ob Erektionsfähigkeit gegeben war oder nicht.<sup>80</sup> Doch handelt es sich hierbei um einen obrigkeitlich kontrollierten medizinischen Test, keineswegs um erotisches Vergnügen.

Im Mittelalter spielten sich dagegen selbst kollektive Schändungen in 'geordneter Form' ab. So berichtet Bischof Wulfstan von Worchester und York († 1023) von den Vergewaltigungen, die die dänischen Invasoren edlen angelsächsischen Frauen antaten, aber stets "aelc aefter othrum," d.h. einer nach dem anderen. Auch verurteilt er, daß sich oft Männer zusammentäten, um sich zu ihrem Vergnügen eine Sklavin zu kaufen, wobei sie die Hilfloose aber auch nicht zusammen, sondern "aelc aefter othrum" beschliefen.<sup>81</sup>

Sogar erotische Phantasien liefen anscheinend stets in geordneten Zweierbeziehungen ab: Nicht einmal Texte vom Typus 'Kloster der Minne'<sup>82</sup> gehen von etwas anderem aus, als daß man hier paarweise, aber nicht promisk

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[Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950], 56), muß ich den Keltologen zur Entscheidung überlassen.

<sup>77</sup> Gaston Vorberg, *Glossarium eroticum* (Hanau: Müller und Kiepenheuer, s.a. [1965]), 415, 610–13.

<sup>78</sup> Der bekannte Bericht stammt vom päpstlichen Zeremonienmeister Johannes Burckard († 1506), *Johannis Burckardi Liber Notarum ab anno 1483 usque ad annum 1506*, a cura di Enrico Celani (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1910–1912). Vgl. Johannes Burckard, *Dans le secret des Borgia: Journal du cérémoniaire du Vatican: 1492–1503*, trad. de Joseph Turmel, rev. augm. et présentée par Vito Castiglione Minischetti et Ivan Cloulas (Paris: Tallandier, 2003).

<sup>79</sup> [Anonym], "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Frauenzimmers," *Anthropophyteia Jahrbücher* 9 (1912): 244–49; hier 247.

<sup>80</sup> Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 457.

<sup>81</sup> Shari Horner, "The Language of Rape in Old English Literature and Law," *Sex and Sexuality in Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Memory of Daniel Gillmore Calder*, ed. Daniel Gillmore Calder, Carol Braun Pasternack, and Lisa M. C. Weston. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 277 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 149–81, hier 170–71.

<sup>82</sup> Tilo Brandis, *Mittelhochdeutsche, mittelniederländische und mittelniederländische Minnereden*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 25 (München: Beck, 1968), 170–71.

Amor diene. Wenn man die bekannte Stelle “Toutes por touz, et touz por toutes”<sup>83</sup> (die Natur hat alle Frauen für alle Männer gemacht und umgekehrt) im Rosenroman im Kontext liest, sieht man, daß hier nur prinzipielle Möglichkeiten der Zweierbeziehung angesprochen sind, nicht aber Promiskuität. Nicht einmal die kühnsten erotischen Phantasien der Epoche wie die vom Venus- oder Hörselberg Tannhäusers oder dem Reich der Königin Sibylle<sup>84</sup> entwerfen explizit Bilder promisker Lust. Vielmehr bietet Frau Venus dem Sänger in der Balladenfassung (um 1500) ganz bieder ein monogamisches und permanentes Verhältnis mit einer ihrer Gefährtinnen an: “ich wil euch mein gespielen geben / zu einem stäten weibe.”<sup>85</sup>

Allerdings: Die im Antikenroman ganz exzeptionelle Szene der Blumenmädchen (im *Straßburger Alexander*, um 1180) ist zwar nicht deutlich formuliert, legt aber doch gemeinschaftlichen Sex nahe: Hier trifft das Heer des Welteroberers im Orient auf “megede rehte vollencomen” im Alter von zwölf Jahren, die aus Blumen herauswachsen. Über drei Monate vergnügen sich der Herrscher und seine Vasallen mit ihnen auf das Glücklichsste, danach verwelken diese Wesen allerdings.<sup>86</sup> Diese auf einer orientalischen Sage beruhende Stelle ist jedoch zu isoliert, um als zeittypisch gelten zu können. eementsprechend kommt auch in den Bußbüchern, die doch sonst die minimalsten sexuellen Abweichungen verurteilten, Gruppensex als Sünde gar nicht vor, und auch in den Bordellen des Spätmittelalters scheint dies so gut wie unbekannt gewesen zu sein. Selbst wo sich zwei Männer die Gunst einer Kurtisane teilten,<sup>87</sup> dürfte dies aus finanziellen Gründen geschehen sein, nicht aber, um Triolensex zu praktizieren.

Man muß Gegenbeispiele schon mit der Lupe suchen, aber es gibt sie, u.zw. gerade bei zwei besonders bekannten Personen, nämlich Herzog Wilhelm IX. von Aquitanien (1071–1127) und dem Marschall von Frankreich Gilles de Rays (1404–1440). Während sich ersterer in der berühmten Chanson IV der tagelang mit zwei Schwestern zusammen genossenen Liebe rühmt,<sup>88</sup> hat letzterer, der berüchtigtste Sexualpathologe des Mittelalters, Kinder und Jugendliche beider

<sup>83</sup> *Le roman de la rose*, v. 13886, ed. Daniel Poiron (Paris: Garnier, 1974), 379.

<sup>84</sup> Patch, *The Other World*, 265–71.

<sup>85</sup> Bertrand Michael Buchmann, *Daz jemant singet oder sait: Das volkstümliche Lied als Quelle zur Mentalitätsgeschichte des Mittelalters* (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 1995), 285. Siehe jetzt Hanno Rüter, *Der Mythos von den Minnesängern: die Entstehung der Moringen-, Tannhäuser- und Bremberger-Ballade* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Pfaffe Lambrecht, *Alexanderroman* [u. *Straßburger Alexander*], hg. Elisabeth Lienert (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), 18, 30, 432–41; vgl. Ralf Schlechtweg-Jahn, *Macht und Gewalt im deutschsprachigen Alexanderroman. Literatur – Imagination – Realität*, 37 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2006), 81–82.

<sup>87</sup> Monica Kurzel-Runtscheiner, *Die Töchter der Venus: Die Kurtisanen Roms im 16. Jahrhundert* (München: Beck, 1995), 195.

<sup>88</sup> Wilhelm von Aquitanien, *Gesammelte Lieder*, hg. Werner Dürrson (Zürich: Die Arche, 1969), 20–27.

Geschlechter gruppenweise mißbraucht und hingeschlachtet.<sup>89</sup> Wesentlich weniger bekannt ist, daß der hl. Papst Coelestin V. (1210–1296) in seiner (in dritter Person geschriebenen) Autobiographie von einem Traum berichtet, in dem sich zwei Frauen, an die er ziemlich oft gedacht hatte, zu ihm ins Bett legten, “que valde delectabiles erant, . . . una illarum nudo corpore ab uno latere, et alia ab alio collocabatur . . . per vim extrahebant pannos sub pedibus illius et iungebant se corpori eius . . . .”<sup>90</sup> Natürlich werden diese Traumgestalten als Dämonen fleischlicher Versuchung interpretiert und obsiegt der Heilige endlich. Daß dieser Traum in einer langen Tradition hagiographischer Versuchungsszenen durch Dirnen und Dämonen in Frauenform steht, wie sie sich v.a. in spätantiken Märtyrerakten finden,<sup>91</sup> die auch im Mittelalter immer wieder inspirierten, ändert nichts daran, daß hier einmal ein Schlaglicht auf sonst verschwiegene sexuelle Wünsche fällt.

Erst in der Schwankliteratur des ausgehenden Mittelalters finden sich vereinzelt einschlägige Szenen, die aber charakteristischerweise nicht intentionell, sondern zufällig zustande kommen. So treffen sich in dem Märe “Das untergeschobene Kalb” des Jörg Zobel (M. 15. Jh.) Gatte und Geliebter mit der Frau im Ehebett, es kommt aber nur zu einem Koitus zu zweien, ohne daß die dritte Person beteiligt wäre.<sup>92</sup>

Man muß schon bis zu der italienischen Renaissance-Dichtung warten – am bekanntesten die ersten der *Sei giornate* des Pietro Aretino (1534/1536) –, bis man richtiggehende Gruppenorgien, bemerkenswerter Weise zwischen Geistlichen und Nonnen, beschrieben findet.<sup>93</sup> In der deutschen Literatur bringt dann etwa Martin Montanus (1537–1566) in seiner *Gartengesellschaft* eine auch sonst noch verbreitete Erzählung von zwei Handwerkern, die sich alles teilen außer ihren Ehefrauen. Der eine begeht aber Ehebruch mit der Frau des anderen, worauf sich der andere entsprechend rächt, was dieser, in einer Kiste verborgen, alles genau mitbekommt – der Gegner schläft mit ihr auf dem Deckel – und was auch die Absicht des anderen gewesen war. Anschließend einigen sich alle vier darauf, sich fortan auch

<sup>89</sup> Vgl. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilles\\_de\\_Rais](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilles_de_Rais) (Literatur) (letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>90</sup> Arnaldo Frugoni, *Celestiniana*. Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo. Studi storici, 6–7 (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1954), 61.

<sup>91</sup> Z.B. in der Legende des hl. Chrysanthus (2. Hälfte des 3. Jh.), vgl. Horner, *Language*, 174–75. Weitere Beispiele bei Aline Rouselle, *Der Ursprung der Keuschheit* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1989), 193–214 u.ö.; unbrauchbar ist dagegen Virginia Burnus, *The Sex Life of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography. Divinations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>92</sup> Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität*, 408.

<sup>93</sup> Pietro Aretino, *Ragionamenti*, ed. Romualdo Marrone (Roma: Newton, 1993), 27.

die Frauen zu teilen.<sup>94</sup> Früher kann man auf ähnliche Beispiele schon in der italienischen Novellistik seit dem 14. Jahrhundert stoßen.

Das vielleicht älteste Beispiel steht in den *Trecentonovelle* des Franco Sacchetti (1333–1400) unter dem ironischen Titel „Giovanni Apostolo sotto ombra di santa persona entra in uno romitorio, avendo a fare con tre romite, che più non n’aveva“ (Nr. 101). Einem als Frömmler verehrten Barbier gelingt es, bei drei noch unberührten Einsiedlerinnen zu übernachten, und sie alle nacheinander mit dem aus Boccaccio (*Decameron* 3, 10) entlehnten Argument, er müsse seinen Teufel in ihre Hölle schicken, zu entjungfern. Die Sache gefällt, und da er der Einladung, wiederzukommen, fleißig entspricht, schwinden seine Kräfte, bis er – als Heiliger verehrt – das Zeitliche segnet.<sup>95</sup> Sacchetti deklarierte die Erzählung natürlich als Warnung vor Hypokrisie, wiewohl es klar um den erotischen Unterhaltungswert geht.

Ansätze zu kollektiver Sexualität finden sich jedoch vor allem in mittelalterlichen Texten, die den feindlichen Islam behandeln. Im Westen wußte man ja sowohl von der Akzeptanz von Homosexualität als auch von der Existenz von Harems im Orient, wie man auch von den Paradiesesvorstellungen des Korans und anderer Schriften eine Vorstellung hatte, wenn dieses Wissen auch nicht ganz präzise war. So findet sich beispielsweise eine Andeutung auf entsprechende sarazenische Laster im Roman *Guerrino il Meschino* des Andrea da Barberino (1371–1431).<sup>96</sup> Doch wurden Phantasien kollektiver Sexualität im muslimischen Paradies primär nicht durch die schöne Literatur, sondern durch anti-islamische Traktate verbreitet. Petrus Alphonsi von Toledo zeichnet in einem im Westen weit verbreiteten fiktiven Briefwechsel zwischen einem Christen und einem Muslim (1142 ins Lateinische übersetzt) folgendes Bild vom islamischen Elysium: Die ins „Paradies der Wollust“ aufgenommenen liegen auf wohlgeordneten Betten, von denen aus sie einander betrachten können. Ihnen stehen mit blitzenden Perlen und Juwelen verglichene Frauen zur Verfügung, die trotz aller sexueller Vergnügungen immer wieder ihre Jungfräulichkeit zurückerhalten.<sup>97</sup> Diese Schilderung entspricht wörtlich dem Koran,<sup>98</sup> sie läßt wenigstens an kollektive voyeuristische Vergnügen denken. Im heiligen Buch des Islams heißt es dann freilich weiter, es bestehe ein

<sup>94</sup> Martin Montanus, *Schwankbücher*, hg. Johannes Bolte. Volkskundliche Quellen, III (1899; Hildesheim und New York: Georg Olms, 1972), 321; Dieser Schwank findet sich auch bei Michael Lindener u.a. (freundliche Mitteilung von Albrecht Classen).

<sup>95</sup> *I novellieri italiani*, ed. Valerio Marucci. Bd. 6 (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1996), 304–10.

<sup>96</sup> Gloria Allaire, „Portrayal of Muslims in Andrea da Barberino’s *Guerrino il Meschino*,“ *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, ed. John Tolan. Garland Medieval Casebooks (New York: Routledge, 1996), 243–69; hier 258, 268.

<sup>97</sup> Enrico Cerulli, *Il “libro della scala.”* Studi e testi, 150 (Roma: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1949), 388–89.

<sup>98</sup> 56. Sure 16–41; vgl. 55. Sure 57–79.

Gattenverhältnis zwischen jedem der Geretteten und seiner Huri.<sup>99</sup> Der Dominikaner Wilhelm von Tripolis, der sein ganzes Leben im engsten Kontakt mit Muslimen verbracht hatte und ihnen nicht feindlich gesonnen war, kolportierte dann 1273 noch größere Beglückungen: Das Paradies "ist ein Freudenort, an dem jeder 99 delikate Jungfrauen haben wird, die er jeden Tag genießt – und stets findet er sie unberührt und jungfräulich."<sup>100</sup>

Die im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert nicht zu Unrecht gefürchtete militante Sekte der Assassinen,<sup>101</sup> die einen islamischen Gottesstaat durch Mord- und Selbstmordattentate zu etablieren suchte, soll ihre Anhänger bekanntlich durch die Fiktion an sich gebunden haben, sie seien für eine Zeit lang bereits im Paradies, wobei die Vergnügungen mit hübschen Mädchen eine Hauptrolle spielten. In westlichen Berichten wie dem des Marco Polo sieht das durchaus nach Gruppensex aus.<sup>102</sup> In dem wegen seiner phantastischen Elemente noch viel populäreren Reisebericht des Sir John Mandeville sind es auch Knaben, die den erwählten Mördern zur Verfügung stehen, nicht älter als 15 Jahre; sie und die Mädchen werden als Engel bezeichnet.<sup>103</sup> Der letztgenannte Autor erzählt übrigens auch vom Leben der Kannibalen auf der Insel Lamory (Sumatra), daß diese ganz nackt seien und in völliger Promiskuität lebten, was originellerweise mit dem alttestamentlichen Gebot des 'Wachset und Vermehret Euch!' begründet wird.<sup>104</sup>

Somit wird man die These wagen dürfen, daß die besondere Erregung über die Praktiken der christlichen Ketzler von den genannten Assoziationen an die Feindreligion mitgeprägt waren. Daß, psychologische betrachtet, tabuisierte sexuelle Themen unbewußt eigenen Wünschen entsprechen können und deshalb bei anderen besonders kritisiert werden, bedarf wohl keiner näheren Ausführung, und auch nicht die Bedeutung solcher Mechanismen im Zusammenhang xenophober Stereotypen. In sexualwissenschaftlicher Terminologie wäre dieses Verhalten der Sektierer, wenn wir einmal von seiner Faktizität ausgehen, in die Kategorie des Hypererotismus einzuordnen.<sup>105</sup> Wie aber wäre das Ritual psychologisch zu verstehen? Offensichtlich werden durch die Aufhebung der gesellschaftlichen Normen und die Erzeugung von Dunkelheit Kontrolle und

<sup>99</sup> 56. Sure 38.

<sup>100</sup> Cerulli, *Il "libro della scala,"* 429.

<sup>101</sup> Vgl. zuletzt *The Crusades: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), I, 113–14; siehe auch Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Secret Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizârî Ismâ'îlîs Against the Islamic World* (1955; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

<sup>102</sup> Der Text *Il Milione* kursierte in zahlreichen Fassungen, die durchaus den Eindruck erwecken, mehrere Mädchen würden sich um einen Mann kümmern, vgl. z.B. Hans Rübesamen, *Die Reisen des Venezianers Marco Polo* (München: Heyne, 1963), 53 (I, 23).

<sup>103</sup> *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. with an intro. C. W. R. D. Moseley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 172.

<sup>104</sup> Ebd. 127.

<sup>105</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, *Geschlechtsverirrungen*, 8. Aufl. (1938; Flensburg: Stephenson, 1985), 75–88.

Bewusstsein reduziert, um dem Unbewussten und Unkontrollierten Raum zu geben; in freudscher Terminologie: die Zensur suspendiert, das Es 'befreit.' Es kommt zu einem raptusartigen Durchbruch" (mündlich nach Ralph Frenken).

Dieses Chaos stellt man jedoch intentional her, indem dem 'Augentier,' das der Mensch eben ist, sein wichtigster Kontrollsinn entzogen wird. Andererseits kommt es zu einer sehr handfesten Aufwertung des Haptischen, also des Tastsinns, was, ebenso wie die Aufgabe der Kontrolle, als Element einer Regression in eine sehr frühe Lebensphase verstanden werden kann,<sup>106</sup> einer Regression, bei der es noch nicht um ein bestimmtes Sexual-Objekt geht, wie später für den Erwachsenen, sondern ein jedes gleichwertig erscheint, und einer Regression, die hinter die Entwicklung des durch die elterliche Erziehung konstituierten Über-Ichs führt, denn ein Tabu der "Mutter Kirche" zu brechen, entspricht psychoanalytisch fraglos einem Aufbegehren gegen die elterliche Gewalt. Doch ist eben diese Regression andererseits von außen induziert, u.zw. von einer Autorität, dem Sektenführer. Und dieser will damit eine neue Ordnung schaffen, nämlich eine Gemeinschaft mit einer neuen Sozial- und Sexualstruktur. Daß in jenen Fällen, wo der Orgien-Vorwurf nur als häresiologischer Topos zu bezeichnen ist, von 'Rechtgläubigen' auf ihre Gegner projizierte Phantasien derselben Struktur wirkten, braucht wohl kaum erläutert zu werden. Hierin sind die diskutierten Vorwürfe als Manifestationen der unbewußten oder bewußten Sexualphantasien der zum Zölibat verpflichteten Kritiker zu lesen.

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<sup>106</sup> Den Zusammenhang von Orgie und Regression hat Sigmund Freud bereits angedeutet: *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*. Bd. XII. Studienausgabe, IX (Frankfurt: Fischer 2000), 131.



So der Endkrist erschlagen wirt. So sprechen sin diener sy ha  
 bē weder got noch herren. vnd leben den suntlich vnd noch lust  
 des leibs doch werden m verlihen rrv tag. Ob sy wellen ruwe  
 empfal en Das stet ouch geschriben in Compendio theologie



Ab. 1: Orgie: Aus einem Blockbuch mit der Antichrist-Legende, anonym dt.  
 Holzschnitt E. 15. Jh. (ganzseitig)  
 aus: Raoul Vaneigem, *Il movimento del libero spirito* (Turin: Nautilus-Verlag,  
 1995), Bildteil ohne Paginierung.

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## Desire, Parody, and Sexual Mores in the Ending of Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*: An Invitation Through the Looking Glass

A provocative surprise awaits the audience at the end of *Ipomedon*, the debatably courtly twelfth-century Anglo-Norman romance by Hue de Rotelande. Not only do the newly-wed protagonists enjoy their marital bliss in sexually explicit terms, but also the narrator invites female listeners to his house and obliquely propositions them. Critics have responded to this burlesque epilogue in a range of ways, finding it alternately misogynist,<sup>1</sup> humorous,<sup>2</sup> puzzling,<sup>3</sup> or "too shameless to be quoted."<sup>4</sup> I propose to make sense of it by observing that the

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<sup>1</sup> Roberta Krueger, "Misogyny, Manipulation, and the Female Reader in Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*," *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context, Selected Papers from the Fifth Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. Keith Busby and Erik Kooper. Utrecht Publications in General and Comparative Literature, 25 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1990), 395–409; here 405. *Ipomedon, poème de Hue de Rotelande (fin du XIIe siècle)*, ed. and intro. A. J. Holden (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979), 55. William Calin, "The Exaltation and Undermining of Romance: *Ipomedon*," *The Legacy of Chrétien de Troyes*, vol. 2, ed. Norris J. Lacy, Douglas Kelly, and Keith Busby. Faux Titre, 37 (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1988), 111–24; here 121. Yet Hue's misogynous discourse appears more parodic and self-contradictory than serious, of the sort that Kathleen Andersen-Wyman explicates in *Andreas Capellanus on Love: Desire, Seduction, and Subversion in a Twelfth-Century Latin Text*. Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures (New York and Houndsmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 202–26. See also Albrecht Classen, "Andreas Capellanus aus kommunikationstheoretischer Sicht. Eine postmoderne Auslegung von 'De amore,'" *Mittelateinisches Jahrbuch* 29, 1 (1994): 45–60; Bonnie Wheeler, "The 'Sic et Non' of Andreas's *De Amore*," *Words of Love and Love of Words in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 149–68.

<sup>2</sup> Brenda Hosington, "The Englishing of the Comic Technique in Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*," *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, ed. Jeanette Beer. Studies in Medieval Culture, 25 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1989), 247–63; here 252.

<sup>3</sup> *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, "Notes critiques," 572.

<sup>4</sup> M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 93.

sexual references in the romance's ending have three functions: they conclude the fictional story-line about a long-suffering couple, they also represent the relationship between author/narrator and listener, and additionally they serve to connect the various levels of the romance's narration to one another. I recognize five such levels: the fictional protagonists' sexual love is narrated in the past tense (culminating in lines 10499–540), the "lovers" inscribed as listeners are similarly encouraged to pursue complete sexual satisfaction with consenting partners in the future (lines 10559–70), the narrator asks the adult female inscribed listener to visit his house for a hypothetical dalliance described in the future tense (lines 10571–80), historical audiences witness that fiction as voyeurs regardless of whether they are invited into it, and the historical author attempts a kind of textual flirtation with historical readers at the time of reading.

We are not far from what Roland Barthes has called, almost eight centuries later, *le plaisir du texte*.<sup>5</sup> By this, Barthes means the pleasures of both writing and reading, whose cerebral satisfactions he describes in metaphors of eroticism and seduction.<sup>6</sup> As an author, he says, he tries to "cruise" or "pick up" his reader,<sup>7</sup> and symmetrically, as a reader "in a certain way, *I desire* the author within the text. I need a figure of him . . . , just as he needs one of me."<sup>8</sup> Hue de Rotelande similarly uses desire, seduction, and sexuality as a model for the relationship between audience and author/narrator, but making the comparison in a far more literal, obscene, and irreverent way. The pleasure that Barthes is talking about, and that he often calls *jouissance* in a way that includes its sensual and sexual as well as cerebral forms, has a counterpart in the Old French noun *enveiseüre* or *envoiseure*. Hue uses this word in the prologue to *Ipomedon*, ambivalently declaring that listeners can derive benefit and pleasure from listening to old tales, as the romance claims to be on account of its supposed Latin source, with the phrase "escuter enveiseüres" ("listening to adventures/poems/entertainment/pleasurable things") (p. 62, line 3).<sup>9</sup> The same etymon clearly signifies the pursuit of sexual pleasure in the epilogue where the verb *enveisir* ("to enjoy oneself; to experience sexual pleasure") refers to the same acts as the verbs *amer* ("to love," here in a carnal

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> For parallel cases in late-medieval and early modern French literature where the poet/narrator emerges, metaphorically speaking, as progenitor, see the contribution to this volume by Reinier Leushuis.

<sup>7</sup> Here I am translating the famous critic's colloquial use of the verb *drague*, from this passage: "Ecrire dans le plaisir m'assure-t-il — moi, écrivain — du plaisir de mon lecteur? Nullement. Ce lecteur, il faut que je le cherche (que je le "drague"), *sans savoir où il est*." ("Does [the fact of my] writing with pleasure guarantee—for me as writer—my reader's pleasure? Not at all. I have to pursue the reader (I have to "cruise" him), *without knowing where he is*."). Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte*, 11, italics in the original.

<sup>8</sup> "d'une certaine façon, *je désire* l'auteur : j'ai besoin de sa figure . . . , comme il a besoin de la mienne . . ." Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte*, 46, italics in the original.

<sup>9</sup> In the present article, references to *Ipomedon* are to Holden's edition. All translations are mine.

sense) and "[faire] sun bon" ("to take pleasure, to satisfy sexual desire") (p. 516, lines 10565–69). In hindsight, then, the romance's opening lines about "escuter enveiseüres" can take on literary and sexual connotations alike. Here sex signifies both itself and something other than itself.<sup>10</sup>

Because the romance has so many narrative layers, and because distinctions among them will be important to my argument, while the medieval author seems purposely to blur or conflate some of them, I will use some specific terms to distinguish among them. By "inscribed audience" or "inscribed listeners" I mean those whom the text itself mentions as its hearers; these references form part of the fiction, but also invite us to consider the perspectives of historical audiences. By "historical audiences" or "historical readers" I mean the real people who have heard or read the text, both medieval and modern. (The poem consistently refers to its medieval audience as a group of listeners, not as readers.) By "the author" or "the poet," of course, I refer to Hue de Rotelande, the Anglo-Norman writer who lived in Herefordshire near the border of Wales, in the last quarter of the twelfth century. The "narrator" is a fictional character who tells the tale, often in an amusingly self-contradictory and unreliable fashion. In some ways he resembles the other fictional characters, such as the protagonist Ipomedon whose false appearances trick others. At times, though, this narrator allies himself very closely with the role of writer, even becoming an "implied author" or "author/narrator": he calls himself Hue or Hue de Rotelande, once at the beginning of the romance, once near the middle, and three times at the end in rapid succession.<sup>11</sup>

Each time his name appears, it accompanies a reference to the text that narrates or allegedly writes, called an "estorie" or "estoire," "livre," "escrit," and "romanz."<sup>12</sup> He tells us where his house is, mentions historical friends by name, and self-referentially comments on the task of narrating the tale. This "author/narrator," unreal and immortal, continues pushing at the boundaries that confine him to the fictional narrative plane, never quite able to exit the story fully enough to usurp the position of author. The romance generates a good deal of humor by conflating the real author with the implied author, and its historical

<sup>10</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Christopher R. Clason regarding the transformation of the sexual act into a vehicle to connect the individual lovers with the divine in Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, lines 33, 7176, 10552, 10553, and 10561, respectively. This self-referential play with the author/narrator figure finds powerful parallels in the *Frauendienst* by Ulrich von Liechtenstein (ca. 1260/1270); see Albrecht Classen, "Autobiographische Diskurse als Identitätsexperiente in der Literatur des Spätmittelalters," *Ich – Ulrich von Liechtenstein: Literatur und Politik im Mittelalter: Akten der Akademie Friesach "Stadt und Kultur im Mittelalter" Friesach (Kärnten)*, 2.–6. September 1996, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler and Barbara Maier. Schriftenreihe der Akademie Friesach, 5 (Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag, 1999), 177–204.

<sup>12</sup> *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, lines 34 and 10551, 7198, 10554, and 10560, respectively.

audiences with inscribed ones, especially in its final lines. It stretches and tests the somewhat elastic divisions among the narrative planes, connecting them partly via sexual metaphors that help to make the various levels of the narration usefully comparable to one another.

Because Hue's work is not well known to English-speaking audiences, a brief history and summary are in order. In the 1180s,<sup>13</sup> Hue de Rotelande composed *Ipomedon* and its sequel *Protheselaus*, parodic vernacular verse romances about the knightly adventures of a father and son respectively. The earlier French poem survives, in whole or in part, in three Anglo-Norman manuscripts. Versions of the text circulated relatively widely by the middle of the fifteenth century, by which time it had been copied in at least fragmentary form in France, mentioned by Wolfram von Eschenbach in Germany,<sup>14</sup> named by Chaucer in a list of romances known in England,<sup>15</sup> and—at least three times—translated or readapted from French into Middle English.<sup>16</sup> Despite the breadth of its reception in the Middle Ages, however, Hue's Old French text has undeservedly been somewhat neglected in recent centuries. Two editions of it have been published, a first by Eugene Kölbing and Eduard Koschwitz in 1889,<sup>17</sup> and a second, with a good introduction in French, by A. J. Holden in 1979. As far as I am aware, nobody has translated the Anglo-Norman text into any modern language in the past five hundred years.

Many elements of its plot are familiar or conventional, borrowed from or outright parodying earlier romances or oral folklore.<sup>18</sup> In brief, the prince

<sup>13</sup> Holden summarizes what can be deduced about the dates, *Ipomedon*, 8–11. He rejects the *terminus a quo* put forth by Charles Henry Carter, "Ipomedon, an Illustration of Romance Origin," *Haverford Essays: Studies in Modern Literature Prepared by Some Former Pupils of Professor Francis B. Gummere* in Honor of the Completion of the Twentieth Year of His Teaching in Haverford College (Haverford, PA: private printing, 1909), 237–70; here 237–38, note 1.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach mentions a character called Ipomidôn five times in his *Parzival* (ca. 1205), but that character, king of Babylon and of Nineveh, has little in common with Hue de Rotelande's protagonist. For Wolfram's references to Ipomidôn, see Clifton D. Hall, *A Complete Concordance to Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival*. Contextual Concordances (New York and London: Garland, 1990), 174. For the critical edition, see Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Studienausgabe. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der sechsten Ausgabe von Karl Lachmann. Übersetzung von Peter Knecht. Einführung zum Text von Bernd Schirok (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*, 91.

<sup>16</sup> Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*, 91.

<sup>17</sup> Eugene Kölbing and Eduard Koschwitz, *Ipomedon: Ein französischer Abenteuerroman des 12. Jahrhunderts* (1889; Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1975). Their edition's line numberings differ slightly from Holden's.

<sup>18</sup> On the subject of *Ipomedon*'s sources, see Carter, "Ipomedon, an Illustration of Romance Origin," 235–70; Judith Weiss, "Ineffectual Monarchs: Portrayals of Regal and Imperial Power in *Ipomedon*, *Robert le Diable* and *Octavian*," *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, ed. Corinne J. Saunders. Studies in Medieval Romance (Woodbridge, UK, and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 57–60; Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*, 56; and Holden, *Ipomedon*, "Sources," 46–52.

Ipomedon secretly loves, and is loved by, a strong-minded young duchess who has vowed to marry only the best knight in the world. She is never named in the text, but the narrator and characters alike call her *La Fièrre*, "the proud lady," in tones that range from admiration to disapproval. The two aristocratic lovers embody symmetrical forms of excess: her great tenacity matches his great adventurousness, and vice versa.

The feisty young duchess is determined to keep her vows despite her family's and advisers' repeated demand that she marry. Ipomedon, like his beloved, is very autonomous and similarly described as *fier*.<sup>19</sup> For a period of years, and approximately 10,000 lines, he prevents others from knowing that he is an exemplary knight, by disguising himself at the many tournaments he wins, and stubbornly pretending to be a coward when he stays at court. He takes his anonymous exploits to excess, while both his country (Púglia, in southern Italy) and hers (Calabria, nearby) suffer for lack of leadership. His insistence on anonymity results not from modesty nor lack of self-respect but from excess pride, called *fierté*, or, more negatively, *orgoïl* (p. 117, line 1181). Even after his father's death, he prefers to continue adventuring in disguise rather than become king. After many delays, however, Ipomedon finally abandons his pretenses and the lovers marry, thus fulfilling La Fièrre's two seemingly incompatible intentions, to marry only the man she loves and to marry only the best knight in the world. At last the romantic and dynastic plot lines reach a happy ending.

Whether they appear more admirable or more ridiculous depends on one's perspective on the elements of parody. Scholars have already noted that Hue writes in "humorous response" to Geoffrey of Monmouth and to Wace,<sup>20</sup> to Thomas d'Angleterre's *Tristan*, and to motifs found in oral folklore.<sup>21</sup> Hue was a contemporary of already well-known authors such as Marie de France, and Chrétien de Troyes, and was clearly very familiar with the vernacular writing of his time. He seems conscious of the historical timing of his début as an author of romance in the 1180s, when the genre's conventions were already established, and ripe for him to make fun of—especially the literary modes he seems to have considered pretentious, unrealistic, or euphemistic. Along with William Calin, I think that Hue particularly observes and develops comic possibilities that Chrétien had established but not chosen to take to such extremes.<sup>22</sup>

Hue's own writing restlessly conjoins dissonant elements in a strange and entertaining form: *Ipomedon* is "simultaneously a courtly romance and a burlesque parody of a courtly romance," to quote its editor Anthony Holden.<sup>23</sup> As Judith

<sup>19</sup> He is described as *fier* in lines 10476 and 10548, for example.

<sup>20</sup> Weiss, "Ineffectual Monarchs," 59.

<sup>21</sup> Calin, "Exaltation and Undermining," 114.

<sup>22</sup> Calin, "Exaltation and Undermining," 115, 123–24.

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Holden, "Introduction," *Protheselaus*. Anglo-Norman Text Society, 47–49 (London: Anglo-

Weiss puts it, "Hue's romances have a strongly ironic tone, which on occasion descends into the comic, even the obscene; his handling of popular romance topics seems primarily intended to make us laugh."<sup>24</sup> Even if we can identify certain passages as obvious parody and others as mostly serious, the former tend to destabilize the latter. The poem often moves in a rhythm of constructing and self-contradicting, reminiscent of a child's repeatedly building sand castles and knocking them over.

For one thing, the narrator establishes himself as humorously unreliable, who slyly undermines his own statements and who practices "the art of lying" ("de mentir l'art"), even humorously contradicting his own statement that he is telling the truth (p. 380, line 7185). In particular, the French text's ending ultimately subverts what moralizing or chivalrous passages precede it. Hue may already be mocking a literary convention of happy romance-endings.<sup>25</sup>

The final lines are worth a closer look. Here the narrator praises the loyal lovers who have preserved their virginity until marriage, but in terms that grow increasingly self-contradictory:

A Barlet fut grant l'assemblee,  
 Illoc est la Fiere espusee;  
 Unc deux ne furent assemblez  
 Ki tant se fussent entreamez.  
 Jo quit ke ele out sun vu tenu  
 Kar deske adunc pucele fu,  
 E de lui le requit jo bien  
 Ke unc ne se entremist de cel ren. (p. 514, lines 10499–506)

[The gathering at Barletta was large;  
 La Fièrè was married there.  
 Never have two people been united [in marriage]  
 Who had loved each other for so long.  
 I believe that she had kept her vow,

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Norman Text Society, 1991–1993), vol. 3, 4. Similarly, Robert Hanning, "Engin in Twelfth-Century Romance: An Examination of the *Roman d'Eneas* and Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*," *Yale French Studies* 51 (1974): 82–101; here 101, notes its "balanced art."

<sup>24</sup> Weiss, "Ineffectual Monarchs," 60.

<sup>25</sup> Hue's writing provides a useful reminder that serious and parodic elements coexist quite early in the development of Old French romance. It would be easy to imagine that 'high' or 'courtly' romances of the twelfth century were later followed by more 'decadent' or 'low' and 'parodic' ones, but this is not necessarily the case. The era that gave us fabliaux also generated longer narrative poems such as Hue's two irreverent romances, which generate humor and dynamic tension in multi-layered narratives. This observation can help us reconsider a number of thirteenth-century Francophone texts, such as *Aucassin et Nicolette* with its parodic episodes, *Wistasse le Moine* with its amoral and constantly disguised trickster-hero, the *Roman de Silence* with its intricate constructs of gender and narration, and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* with its obscene ending.

For she was a virgin until then,  
 And as for him, I also do believe  
 That he had never done the deed.]

This applause for premarital chastity, with reference to the long tests of patience that the couple has previously endured, might seem conventional and conservative, but Hue cannot keep a straight face for long. The narrator's insinuations grow increasingly arch:

Andui, ço quit, savront asez  
 Einz ke li gius seit tut finez,  
 Kar l'um pot saveir cel mester  
 Senz aprendre e senz enseigner,  
 E il ne pot autrement estre  
 Kar n'i valt ren trop privé mestre ;  
 Chescun de cez ad ben gardé  
 A autre sa virginité . . . (p. 514, lines 10507–14)

[I believe that both of them will learn a lot  
 Before the game is over,  
 Because a person can learn to play this game  
 Without studying and without teaching,  
 And it cannot be any other way,  
 Since too private a tutor is worthless for that.

Each one of them has saved  
 His or her virginity for the other . . .]

Then, mustering greater immediacy and intensity by using the present tense, the poet describes the newlyweds' sexual union so crudely as to use an Old French *f*-word:

Or se entreament tant par amur  
 Ke il se entrefoutent tute jur. (p. 514, lines 10515–16)

[Now they are so much in love with each other  
 That they fuck each other all day long.]

This vulgar wording is not typical for the Old French romance genre, whose authors generally elide, omit, or euphemize mentions of body parts and bedroom scenes, in a spirit that can either dignified or teasing.<sup>26</sup> However, it does match *Ipomedon*'s ongoing parody of romance conventions, and the epilogue is not the poem's only passage to use obscene language. There are signs that medieval copyists found this passage objectionable: Holden notes that the scribe of the base manuscript, London, British Library Cotton Vespasian A VII, has written the verb

<sup>26</sup> Philippe Ménard, *Le rire et le sourire dans le roman courtois en France au moyen âge (1150–1250)*. Publications romanes et françaises, 105 (Geneva: Droz, 1969), 684.



"beisent" ("kiss" or "fuck" in Old French) above the verb "foutent,"<sup>27</sup> and these lines are omitted from MSS. London, British Library, Egerton 2515, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson Miscellanea D 913, as well as from the Middle English renderings. Here the poet not only chooses *fabliau*-like wording, but also seems to be making the verbs *aimer* ("to love") and even *aimer par amour* ("to love with [true] love") into euphemisms for lust. In keeping with the reciprocal relationship that Ipomedon and La Fièvre have already established, the reflexive verbs *se entreatment* and *se entfoutent* suitably indicate the mutuality of their love and desire described here. It is not simply a story in which "boy gets girl," for in the long courtship the bride has been an active though often frustrated participant.

Next, the narrator snidely claims the groom's long stint of premarital chastity to be unique:

Hue de Rotelande dit  
 E vus mustre par cest escrit,  
 K'unkes pus cel tens ne fut niez  
 Ne chevaler ne clerc lettrez  
 Ki del tut, senz faire sun bon,  
 Amast cum fist Ipomedon. (p. 516, lines 10553–58)

[Hue de Rotelande says  
 And shows you, via this book,  
 That never again, since that time,  
 Was a knight or lettered cleric born

Who loved completely, as Ipomedon did,  
 Without doing what he desired (premaritally).]

Perhaps nobody is expected to aspire to the superlative heights of knightly prowess and sexual virtue represented in the tale, for (says Hue) since Ipomedon's time, nobody ever loved so patiently and chastely — not even supposedly celibate clerics (lines 10556–58).<sup>28</sup>

Now the rhetorical stage is set for the final pieces of parody, drawing in the inscribed audiences, as the poet broadly caricatures the epilogue of the *Tristan* by

<sup>27</sup> *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, 514, apparatus for line 10516.

<sup>28</sup> This may amount to a satirical comment on the Catholic Church's struggle to establish celibacy for all of its clergy, at least since the eleventh century; on this subject, see the contributions to this volume by Andrew Holt and Jennifer D. Thibodeaux.

Thomas d'Angleterre.<sup>29</sup> Here Hue connects multiple narrative planes by means of exhortation to sexual persistence:

Ipomedon a tuz amanz  
 Mande saluz en cest romanz,  
 Par cest Hue de Rotelande ;  
 De part le deu d'amur cumande  
 Des or mes lealment amer,  
 Sens tricherie e senz fauser ;  
 E se nuls de amer se retrait  
 Devant ço ke il ait sun bon fait,  
 Enfin cil ert escumengé,  
 E puis si ait plener cungé  
 De enveisir la u il purra,  
 Asouz ert cil ki plus avra. (pp. 516–17, lines 10559–70)

[Ipomedon sends greetings to all lovers  
 In this romance  
 Via Hue de Rotelande himself.  
 On behalf of the God of Love, he commands  
 [All lovers] to love loyally from now on,  
 And if anyone gives up loving  
 Before doing what he desires,  
 He will end up being excommunicated;  
 And then, if he has full permission  
 To take pleasure where he may [but he does not],  
 Someone [else] who gets the rest will be absolved.]

The narration has already gathered momentum in its slide from tongue-in-cheek moralizing to an amoral conclusion. Hue gives it a further tipping-point by playfully exploiting the ambiguity of the adverb “loyally” (*lealment*, line 10563). In the context of the protagonists’ long-delayed sexual union, “loyalty” clearly refers to persistence in premarital virginity. However, now the meaning of “loyalty” changes to mean persistence in lust, as authorized and commanded by “the God of Love” in line 10562. (In twelfth-century Francophone literature, the God of Love is usually a non-Christian figure, closely associated with or identical to Cupid, son of Venus, the goddess of love.) Here we find a strangely indirect form of transmission: the God of Love supposedly sends the message to Ipomedon, who

<sup>29</sup> Thomas’s epilogue similarly begins, “Tumas fine ci sun escrit : / A tuz amanz saluz i dit, / As pensis e as amerus, / As emvius, as desirus, / As enveisiez e as purvers, / (A tuz cels) qui orunt ces vers. / . . .” (“Here Thomas ends his book. / He sends greetings to all lovers, / To the pensive and the amorous ones, / The lustful and the desirous, / The fun-loving and the decadent / [To all those] who will hear these verses. / . . .”) Thomas d’Angleterre, *Tristan et Iseut: Les poèmes français, la saga norroise*, ed. Daniel Lacroix and Philippe Walter (Paris: Lettres Gothiques, Livre de Poche, 1989), 482, lines 36–43.

then sends it to Hue-the-author and Hue-the-narrator, who sends it to listeners at the present time of narrating, and who also addresses future (real and inscribed) audiences in the future tense.

The epilogue ironically combines sex-positive subject-matter with the Christian metaphors of absolution and excommunication. This profane and comical use of the religious topos continues when the narrator purports to own a "letter of absolution" and flirtatiously invites female inscribed listeners to see it at his house in Herefordshire. By now we are far from the imaginary milieu of Italian courts:

A Credehulle a ma meisun  
 Chartre ai de l'absoluciun ;  
 Se il i ad dame u pucele  
 U riche vedve u dameisele  
 Ne voille creire ke jo l'ai  
 Venge la, jo li musteraï ;  
 Ainz ke d'iloc s'en seit turné  
 La chartre li ert enbrevé,  
 E ço n'ert pas trop grant damages  
 Si li seaus li pent as nages. (p. 517, lines 10571–80)

[At my house at Credenhill  
 I have a letter of absolution.  
 If there is a married lady or an unmarried woman  
 Or a rich widow or a virgin  
 Who doesn't believe that I have it,  
 She should come here. I will show it to her.  
 Before she leaves this place,  
 The letter will be signed over to her,  
 And it won't be too much of a problem  
 If the seal hangs down to her ass.]

This seal, Hue declares, will dangle down to his imagined visitor's *nages* ("ass" or "ass-cheeks"), an unforgettable image that carries both sexual and textual implications. An important letter or official document such as a charter of absolution would, in reality, bear a stamped wax seal, as a sign of authenticity and as evidence of the sender's identity. The seal (and its ribbon if it had one, as seems likely in the poem) would be affixed to the document that had been penned and folded. Since a wax seal hangs ("pent," line 10580) only after the folded document has been opened, Hue implies that he has unsealed the letter prior to the time of narration; perhaps he has already put the charter to use, in order to be absolved for previous (sexual?) acts. It might not be the first time he has invited women to his house for this purpose. He mentions possessing the letter before he invites the potential visitors, as though at some time previously he had planned to make these advances upon his female inscribed listenership. Hue's purported possession of

the letter implies that he expects to need it, or to have a female guest (or several) who will need to share its salutary power. He says the brief will be signed over to his visitor, as though she would need pardon, or consider herself to need it, or be more easily enticed to take part in the imagined liaison if it is forgiven before the fact.

The finale's "letter of absolution" constitutes a literary hoax in addition to the two others with which, as Brenda Hosington rightly observes, the romance begins and ends.<sup>30</sup> Its prologue facetiously claims that the text is a translation of a Latin source (lines 25–38), and comically casts doubt on the author/narrator's ability to understand the grammatical cases and tenses of the supposed Latin original.<sup>31</sup> Also, its epilogue ridiculously declares that the poem is a source of the well-known *Roman de Thèbes* (lines 10541–42), although contemporary audiences would likely have known that that more famous romance was decades older than *Ipomedon*.

Whereas by Hue's time many Francophone literary works (ca. 1150–1180) disingenuously establish their narrator's modesty and mention authoritative textual sources, *Ipomedon*'s narrator/author systematically undermines his own authority and the authority of other texts. Just as he mocks the overblown respect for Latin sources, so too does he ridicule the ecclesiastical letter and its supposed power to remit temporal punishment for sin.

This letter belongs with the narrator in the poem's fictional frame, not on the same narrative level as the romance's characters, where none is needed. Nor is it likely that the author himself possessed such a letter, though by the twelfth century some bishops and popes were beginning to sell letters of plenary

<sup>30</sup> Hosington, "The Englishing of the Comic Technique," 250–51. No Latin source for *Ipomedon* is known to exist. William Calin, "Contre la fin'amour? Contre la femme?: Une Relecture de textes du Moyen Age," *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, 61–82; here 65. *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, "Notes critiques," 519. Carter, "Ipomedon, an Illustration of Romance Origin," 264, points out other Old French texts that similarly make dubious claims to be translations from Latin, such as *Perceforest*, *Meliadus*, and Gautier Map's *Livre del Graal*.

<sup>31</sup> No Latin source for *Ipomedon* is known to exist. William Calin, "Contre la fin'amour? Contre la femme?: Une Relecture de textes du Moyen Age," *Courtly Literature: Culture and Context*, 61–82; here 65. *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, "Notes critiques," 519. Carter, "Ipomedon, an Illustration of Romance Origin," 264, points out other Old French texts that similarly make dubious claims to be translations from Latin, such as *Perceforest*, *Meliadus*, and Gautier Map's *Livre del Graal*. On Hue's parodic use of elements from older romances, see Calin, "Exaltation and Undermining," 111–124; here 112. "Notes critiques" in *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, 536. Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*, 56; Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 158–74; here 158–59. Hosington, "The Englishing of the Comic Technique," 251 and 258. On Hue's parodic use of elements from older romances, see Calin, "Exaltation and Undermining," 111–24; here 112. "Notes critiques" in *Ipomedon*, ed. Holden, 536. Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*, 56; Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 158–74; here 158–59. Hosington, "The Englishing of the Comic Technique," 251 and 258.

indulgence, promising remission of the temporal punishment for sin, to Crusaders in particular. I do not know of any historical evidence that Hue supported or participated in the Crusades. It is more plausible that he had heard of the practice of selling letters of indulgence, and found in it both cause for mockery, and a useful literary device.<sup>32</sup>

We may suppose that the same letter of indulgence absolves the dalliances of the author/narrator, the listener/visitor, and the aforementioned male lover or listener who has "full permission to take pleasure where he may" (lines 10568–69). That is, the multi-purpose charter of *absoluciun* proffered in line 10572 enables the persistent, grammatically male lover to be absolved (*Asouz*, line 10570) and to avoid being excommunicated (*escumengé*, line 10567). The narrator claims that a man will be absolved if he gets the "plus" and a woman might be absolved if she goes to the house at Credenhill; presumably the "plus" and the letter are imagined to have the parallel benefits of *absoluciun* and "*bon[s]*" ("pleasure," or the fulfillment of desire).

The epilogue seems to place the author/narrator among the group of "all lovers" who are encouraged to pursue their desires all the way to this *plus* or "remainder," the desired thing that remains to be had. When urging "all lovers" to persevere in the pursuit of consensual sexual satisfaction, the narrator seems to justify the proposition that he himself is about to make, and also to involve his inscribed audience in two kinds of sexual scenarios that compare (incompletely) to the newlyweds'. By means of the sexual goings-on among the characters, the poem connects the fictional and the real, the narrator and the inscribed listeners, while also implicating historical audiences.

It is not clear what exactly the narrator imagines will happen at his house if the inscribed female listeners accept his invitation to see his charter. The epilogue is no less obscene for being playfully allusive rather than utterly explicit. As Philippe Ménard observes of Hue's sexual metaphors, "He purports to say the least, in order to insinuate the most."<sup>33</sup> Is it meant literally or figuratively if the seal hangs down to a visitor's *nages*? If we took the last two lines literally, to mean a bodily juxtaposition of her *derrière* with the seal, then we would have to wonder quite what she (and he) were doing, and how: is the author/narrator perhaps spanking his visitor with a rolled-up ecclesiastical document, or is she having some other kind of intimate contact with the charter?

*Le plaisir du texte*, indeed: we cannot tell whether the convergence of text and *nages* might be genital, anal, or otherwise. A partial solution to the mystery of the seal, that makes sense given the scene's placement right after the protagonists have sex and "all lovers" are encouraged to do the same, is Nicolas Jacobs's hypothesis

<sup>32</sup> It is tempting to wonder whether the episode of the false letter in Hue's *Protheselaus* can shed additional light on the question of the letter of indulgence in *Ipomedon*.

<sup>33</sup> "Il feint de dire le moins pour suggérer le plus." Ménard, *Le rire et le sourire*, 687.

that the dangling seal represents a scrotum. As Jacobs observes, a very similar image appears in both *Ipomedon* and the troubadour-lyric beginning "Un estribot farai," composed by Peire Cardinal in about 1216–1218.<sup>34</sup> If the image of the seal thus functions by metonymy, then the lady's *nages* touch the narrator's body rather than a sealed document. The use of the verb "pent" (since gravity would make seals and testicles tend to hang downward) may mean that the narrator imagines himself standing very close behind his listener's *nages*, or perhaps the two people might have assumed some other position such as the "missionary" one. It is possible, though not at all certain, that the final lines signify a male-superior position; this would amount to a provocative metaphor for the relationship between narrator and audience. Nor is it clear what exactly happens if the charter is *enbrevé* to the lady ("signed over, copied, written, recorded"): if the letter has already been composed by this time, then now who is writing on what?

Would the visitor receive a duplicate of the letter, or is the act of signing or copying a metaphor for some more intimate act during which the seal will dangle as mentioned? Is a state of undress implied, though not specified, by the noun *nages* and by the testicular image of the dangling seal, which are less than apt to describe fully-clothed people? In any case, the poem's final lines are open-ended, ambiguously crafted in such a way as to provoke speculation about what exactly is meant. The narrator gets the last laugh, partly by coaxing the audience's thinking down to his own level.

That level is intermittently naughty, parodic, humorous, and mocking. When the narrator and the characters differ, as they often do, even the most conventionally honorable heroes do not always come off well. Hypertrophied courtly self-restraint, and the (literary?) culture of delayed gratification, are intermittently disdained as impractical, unkind, silly. Whereas the 'good' characters such as the proud duchess of Calabria are very particular about their choice of mate and accept no substitutes, the narrator and—as he insinuates—his imagined female visitors are not nearly so honor-bound, monogamous, or choosy. Incredulous adult female visitors are treated as equally welcome, even as fungible, without regard for their age or marital status. The narrator offers them a non-marital or extramarital dalliance, such as with the *dame* of line 10573; in the final lines he makes no mention of marriage, love, chastity, or patience. Certainly he lays no claim to being a virgin nor to having the sorts of knightly honor that supposedly make the hero *Ipomedon* worthy of marrying his lady and having sex with her. Nor does the poet imagine his inscribed listener to have such qualities, nor to care about the valor of her narrator and host.

<sup>34</sup> Nicolas Jacobs, "Une allusion impudique chez Hue de Rotelande: *Se li seaus li pent as nages*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 96, 2 (1995): 223–24. The song by Peire Cardinal is number XXXIV in the edition by René Lavaud, *Poésies complètes du troubadour Peire Cardenal* (1180–1278). Bibliothèque Méridionale, 2nd Series, 34 (Toulouse: Edouard Privat, 1957), 206–08.

To adapt the term “friends with benefits,” one could say that Hue offers himself as a “narrator with benefits” who solicits female “listeners with benefits.” He broadens the comedy here by sounding indiscriminately eager to apply his charter to the derrière of any lady who would be so bold, lustful, curious, dull-witted, or gullible as to enter his house. The poem refers to the female visitor with singular nouns, pronouns, and verbs, but it allows for and invites the possibility that any number could juxtapose their *nages* with his document. He sounds quite content to be promiscuous if multiple women were to visit his house. By inviting all manner of women, “dame u pucele/ U riche vedve u dameisele” (“a married lady or an unmarried woman, / Or a rich widow or a virgin”) (lines 10573–74), he envisions avatars of virtually all the adult female audience. Similarly he gestures toward a potentially large number of women when he invites specifically those who will disbelieve his claim to have the letter, because by this point (line 10572) the text has provided ample cause for skepticism, especially given its previous literary “hoaxes” and narratorial self-reference to lies and mistakes. (The invitation suggests, double-sidedly, that ideal audiences are skeptical, alert to contradiction and ambiguity.

The poet may also be punning on the place-name *Credehulle* and the Latin verb *credere*, ‘to believe.’) Grammatically, too, the narrator implies that some female members of the inscribed audience may not believe that he owns a letter of indulgence: this passage resounds with hypothetical terms, for the word “if” is repeated three times over eight lines (“se” in line 10565, “si” in line 10568, “Se” in line 10573), and the consequences of this hypothetical condition are described in the future tense (lines 10576–79), a choice of time frame that also takes us further away from reality. Yet if someone could go to the narrator’s house and see the charter, or if its seal hung down to her derrière, surely then she would believe he had it, and at that moment the logical precondition for the invitation would vanish. In this game of logic, presumably the least credulous listeners would also be least likely to be persuaded to go to the narrator’s house.

Part of the humor here results from an internal contradiction, a form of logical trap. Audiences, real and inscribed, may choose whether to believe that the narrator possesses a charter as he claims, and consequently to determine whether or not to be invited to his house. When Hue invites only skeptical women to his house, he ironically plays on both their potential trust in him (an implicit precondition of the visit) and their incredulity (an explicit precondition of the visit).

Next, let us consider the inscribed listeners who are excluded from the imagined scene at Credenhill: all male ones, presumably, as well as any female ones who believe the narrator possesses a certain very useful letter. The narrator has clearly established an inscribed listenership that includes men: he addresses sectors of his audience in masculine terms such as “signurs” (“lords,” e.g., lines 5551, 5575, 7175)

or "amanz" ("lovers," line 10559), that cannot designate women solely. The epilogue also refers to the listening lover in grammatically masculine pronouns such as "nuls" (singular subject case, line 10565), "il" in line 10566, and "cil" in lines 10567 and 10570. These pronouns could potentially refer both to men and women, but they do clearly include participation by men specifically. One cannot tell whether any of the inscribed female listeners believe he has the letter, or whether, perhaps, they might profess to believe this for reasons of their own; but there remains a logical possibility that some may hear the final scene without being invited into it.

The epilogue relegates inscribed male listeners and credulous female ones to a peculiar double position as both insiders and outsiders: they are excluded from the represented space of the "house," yet remain spectators to the scene that they hear described. As A. C. Spearing discovers in certain other medieval poems, "the element of voyeurism in a narrative about love is brought to our attention, so that it functions . . . as something in which we as readers are knowingly implicated . . ." <sup>35</sup> In this sense, even those who are not depicted inside the narrative frame still participate in the visit to Hue's house. Such is the position of a portion of its inscribed audience, and all of its historical audience that perseveres to the end.

When the epilogue invites some listeners to come into the piece of fiction, it conflates the inscribed and the real in a type of narratorial practical joke. The author/narrator asks his female inscribed listeners to cross into the text somewhat the way Lewis Carroll's Alice goes "through the looking glass." Alice says,

'Let's pretend the glass has got soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through—' She was up on the chimney-piece while she said this, though she hardly knew how she had got there. And certainly the glass *was* beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist.

In another moment Alice was through the glass . . . <sup>36</sup>

In a similar way, *Ipomedon's* narrator purports to invite some members of his listenership to enter the frame-narrative where he represents them bodily (with their *nages*) at his house. I suspect that the epilogue amounts not only to a remark about the ways in which his tale purports to draw listeners in, but also, with characteristic irony, points to ways audiences cannot enter the world of fiction. On

<sup>35</sup> A. C. Spearing, "The Medieval Poet as Voyeur," in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991), 57–86; here 62–63. Spearing develops further case-studies in *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge [England] and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Madeline Harrison Caviness offers a feminist study of the gaze, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Lewis Carroll [Charles Dodgson], *Through the Looking Glass in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Woodbury, NY: Bobbley Publishing, 1979), 132.



the one hand, even if nobody can physically climb inside the story the way Alice goes through the mirror, the whole fiction is available to audiences' imagination all the same, regardless of their genders. In this sense, historical audiences do make the virtual visit to Hue's house—even those who are seemingly not invited there. Even if the narrator invites only the adult female inscribed listeners to his house, the poem makes all its audience into spectators of the scene at Credenhill, including listeners/readers who think of themselves as male or as credulous about the letter of indulgence.

In fact, other than in the invitation (which ultimately can neither require any group of listeners to participate, nor prevent them from being implicated), the scene at Credenhill does not assign a specifically gendered role to the visitor. After all, men and women alike have *nages*. Although Hue invites only women, and similarly although Barthes refers to his reader-to-be-seduced as (at least grammatically) masculine, audiences of all genders are implicated in the relationship. As a result, the ending of *Ipomedon* may not remain as heterosexual as it seems at first glance.

On the other hand, despite the ways audiences are broadly implicated in the ending regardless of gender, the members of the historical audience inevitably remain outside the text, distinct from the fictional characters and the inscribed listeners. The excluded listeners' position here is useful to consider because it can help us see more clearly the ways in which this kind of narrative boundary-crossing is and is not possible. Nobody can go inside the tale the way Alice climbs through the mirror into the alternate reality of its reflection, or the way Hue's inscribed female interlocutors are imagined to go to the house at Credenhill. Hue beckons at outsiders to enter the text as though through a door, but in this sense no such portal exists. The narrator pretends to have control over some elements of authorship, and even to suggest what his inscribed listeners should do; but ultimately, outside the fiction, neither poet nor storyteller has control over who spectates, hears, reads, identifies with the tale and/or stands aside from it, nor how. This results from another practical joke, the conflation of author and narrator. Hue, the historical author, purports to offer the listeners a letter of indulgence, whereas the fictional narrator is actually the one who then substitutes fictional sex for the material text. After this comical bait-and-switch, the historical author cannot fulfill promises or insinuations made by the (fictional) narrator.

If Hue's inscribed listeners crossed into the text, would they do so willingly? Would they want the letter's seal, or the narrator's testicles, dangling down to their *nages*? This long poem's plot is almost obsessively motivated by questions of consent, particularly the future bride's willingness to marry, and the future groom's willingness to be recognized as worthy of her hand. Thus it is apropos to consider the question of consent in the final fantasy into which the narrator invites certain female listeners. In the world of the characters, an acceptable love-match

requires both parties' assent: it cannot be unrequited (such as the one-sided passion that the duchess's *suivante*, Ismeine, declares for *Ipomedon*, lines 8858–92) nor unwelcome (such as the villain Leonin's threat to take La Fièvre by force, lines 9269–78). In that parodico-courtly world, ironically, the well-behaved characters get what they want by postponing their satisfaction; they should not make or accept amorous advances too rapidly or too aggressively.

Yet where consent is concerned, the poem's ending has a troubling indeterminacy, characteristic of Hue de Rotelande: the intimate juxtaposition of the *seau* and *nages* looks quite different if we presume it welcome or not. When Hue speaks mock-commandingly in the jussive subjunctive, "Let her come here" ("Venge la," line 10576), is he offering shared pleasure, or a tricky form of dominance, or something between the two? Would the inscribed female listeners be free to refuse? Would they take pleasure in meeting him and wish to benefit from his "letter of absolution"?

If they considered the unspecified act they engage in there to be transgressive (as he seems to suppose they will, for otherwise there would be little reason for him to advertise his possession of the letter), would their misgivings be satisfied by that promise of indulgence? If *domages* may result from the visit—the possibility is present in the way Hue denies it—then exactly what "harm" or "problem" would they involve, and for whom? Does he disrespect the hearer whom he imagines, or even use her in his own textual and sexual fantasy? Is he ostensibly offended by his audience's disbelief, even after amply justifying that disbelief, and is he here proposing a kind of revenge for it, even in jest? Before complaining of sexual harassment, though, let us remember that Hue has just encouraged lovers to follow through on sexual pursuits only if they have full permission ("plener cungé," line 10568—one suspects him of making a terrible pun on "cungé" and the word-root of "cunet," as in line 2269). It is not clear whether the *cungé* refers to consent granted by their partners, as seems most likely, or blanket permission established by the letter of indulgence. In the first case, particularly, the final proposition amounts to a joking offer more than a threat, though the power relationship remains ambiguous.

As I have suggested, Hue de Rotelande's romance ends with far more than simply a 'personals ad.' The results of its endurance over time fit nicely with *Ipomedon*'s playful representation of the roles of author and narrator, inscribed listeners and historical audiences. The prologue suggests that valiant people should let their reputations be remembered after their deaths (lines 15–20), and by chance Hue's odd proposition is still read in Old French more than eight hundred years after he wrote it. The epilogue stands as an ironic textual monument to the man's reputation—not a hero's renown for valor, but a narrator's facetiously self-generated reputation for womanizing, and an author's legacy of literary parody.

Historical audiences are still being propositioned obliquely by a narrator who in some ways is a fictional character in much the same way as *Ipomedon* himself.

Here is an excellent reminder, if ever we needed one, that the narrator and author are not the same, even if they introduce themselves by the same name. After the author's death, it is no longer possible to visit Hue at his house; during the author's life, it was likewise impossible to visit the narrator there. After all, the author creates the narrator, but here the narrator in turn masquerades as the author, placing a textual decoy of himself in the (virtual) house at Credenhill.

This brings us to back the letter of indulgence. If the sexual experiences of characters and inscribed listeners are (somewhat) parallel, then the charter may serve as a stand-in for the romance as a whole. Whereas the letter of indulgence supposedly excuses lovers' lascivious pursuits, in a sense the facetious offer of "absolution" comes only from the romance itself. Indeed, this is the only text that the author/narrator really proffers, with a certain exhibitionistic flair, as he tries to lure the audience onto his territory. A romance is not a medieval document that would have a seal, but in a sense Hue displays his poem somewhat like the charter: the claims "I will show it to her" and "it will be signed over to her" apply to the poem more than to the suppositious letter. (One wonders whether this came to the minds of Philippa Leman and Richard St. George Norroy, who wrote their names on their manuscript copies of *Ipomedon*.<sup>37</sup>)

One use of the epilogue's representation of sexuality is to model (however jokingly) the text's authorship, narration, and imagined reception. It suggests the ways *Ipomedon* is crafted to engage its readers and hearers, and serves as a *mise en abyme* of the potential joys and frustrations of reading or hearing the poem. It seems to compare an erotic encounter (with a spouse, a narrator, or a document) to the experience of hearing or reading the romance itself. The author/narrator tries to attract multiple audience-members into the tale, literally or figuratively. Each level of the enterprise takes time: La Fièvre would have married her prince-knight much earlier if she could have done this, while the narrator repeatedly says he is trying not to make his poem overly long or digressive, although he goes on for 10,580 lines, that I estimate would take about ten hours to read aloud at a moderate pace. Whether or not the delay heightens the tension, for listeners as well as characters, is a matter of opinion. If the author/narrator succeeds at seducing his audience, then an intimate literary encounter may ensue, regardless of whether listeners act as spectators or as inscribed participants. The literary and erotic relationship is subversive, transgressive, and self-justifying. I suspect that the final scene's interplay of erotic invitation and exclusion points to Hue's self-consciousness about using narrative frames to separate, but also unite, the real and the virtual.

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<sup>37</sup> Holden describes the manuscripts in his introduction to *Ipomedon*, 17.

In light of its generalized use of parody, irony, and internal contradiction, I interpret *Ipomedon*'s final lines as more playful and subversive than threatening or cynical. The last word belongs to the narrator, with lust, humor, parody, and literary hoaxes. The speaker and inscribed listeners are represented as perhaps more realistic, more direct, less constrained, and more available for pleasure-seeking than the protagonists. If we recognize the contradictions presented at the narrator's level, and interpret that level of narration as holding some sway over the tale told within it, as I propose, then the epilogue appears humorous and remarkably sex-positive. It casts an ambivalent hindsight on the tale of a hero who takes knightly exploits to cruel excess, and a lady who places impractical, likewise excessive, conditions on her marriage-plans, in a way that ordinary women and men could not imitate without causing a great deal of trouble for themselves and their families.

The finale of *Ipomedon* is all the more significant if we accept Frank Kermode's idea that romances are "end-determined fictions."<sup>38</sup> To end *Ipomedon* with the word *nages*, and on a bawdy note, sets the other such notes in the poem to resonating. To end it with a humorous quip, making fun of an ecclesiastical document, strengthens the poem's other textual "hoaxes." To end it with a sexual allusion subverts and complicates on the foregoing speech about the virtues of premarital chastity. To end it in the setting of Credenhill (far from the quasi-Italian setting of the characters' courts) has a distancing effect on the tale that the narrator's interpolations ironically recast. The result is a roguish, teasing, almost post-modern comment about the ways a text can attempt to attract its audience, and about the ways it can call them into its world, or at least purport to. The sexual finale of *Ipomedon* amounts not only to a dirty joke but also to a demonstration of Hue's sophisticated play on the narrative levels that he cleverly constructs and recombines.

<sup>38</sup> Steven R. Mentz, "The Heroine as Courtesan: Dishonesty, Romance, and the Sense of an Ending in *The Unfortunate Traveler*," *Studies in Philology* 98, 3 (2001): 339–58; here 343, citing Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Mary Flexner lectures, 1965) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 6.



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## Feminine Sexuality and the Crusades Clerical Opposition to Women as a Strategy for Crusading Success<sup>1</sup>

During Louis IX's first crusade in 1248, the lay chronicler Jean de Joinville, an important member of the nobility and advisor to the King, took special precautions concerning his sleeping arrangements. His actions were not the result of any fears he had of his nearby Muslim opponents, rather, he was worried about the presence of women in the crusaders' camp. Indeed, in the evenings he made sure his bed was placed in such a position so that no one would suspect him of immorality with regard to women.<sup>2</sup> Although Joinville was writing more than a century and a half after the birth of the crusading movement, his worries over the presence of women were firmly rooted in clerical teachings on feminine sexuality that emerged in the era of the First Crusade.

Although Christian clerics have seemingly always expressed concerns over the sinful effects of feminine sexuality, the widespread imposition of clerical celibacy during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, a crucial era in the development of the crusading movement, brought a heightened interest in the subject.<sup>3</sup> As reform minded clerics were winning the battle to establish celibacy as

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Nina Caputo, Florin Curta, and Andrea Sterk, all of the University of Florida, for their careful reading of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Jean de Joinville, "The Life of St. Louis," trans. Margaret Shaw. *Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicles of the Crusades* (London: Penguin, 1963), 291.

<sup>3</sup> Jo Ann McNamara, "The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150," *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*. ed. Clare A Lees, Medieval Cultures, v. 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3–29; here 5. Because the celibate cleric contradicted traditional secular notions of masculinity, which held that the highest fulfillment of masculine behavior revolved around coitus with women, a number of clerical authors attempted to resolve this dilemma by reaffirming the threat of feminine sexuality as an impediment to the essential spiritual purity of the clergy. As McNamara notes, 5: "An important class of men

a rule for the clergy, they then attempted a broader application of the principles for clerical chastity to Christian society at large, with a particular focus on the warrior class.<sup>4</sup> Just as chastity contributed to victory for clerics on the spiritual battlefield, clerics argued, Christian warriors could be assured of similar success on earthly battlefields if they too embraced chastity.<sup>5</sup>

The crusades, in many ways, represented the ultimate test of this new clerical philosophy of Christian warfare. Crusades preachers portrayed crusading as a *vocacio hominum ad crucem*, a temporary vocation that began with the taking of a vow that involved a spiritual reformation of the crusader's life and included the requirement of chastity for both the unmarried and married crusader.<sup>6</sup> Chastity

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institutionally barred from marriage raised inherently frightening questions about masculinity. Can one be a man without deploying the most obvious biological attributes of manhood? If a person does not act like a man, is he a man?" Clare Lees's edited volume is one of three essential works on the subject of medieval masculinity that also include *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray. Garland Medieval Casebooks, 25 (New York: Garland, 1999); and *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. Dawn Hadley. Women and Men in History (New York: Longman, 1999). See also the contribution to this volume by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux.

<sup>4</sup> This was the period in which warfare was effectively appropriated and sanctified by a reforming Church which sought to limit intra-Christian warfare and to redirect it toward what it considered nobler, even holy, pursuits. The argument that the Church effectively sought to sanctify warfare in the eleventh and twelfth century was first made in the 1930s by Loren C. MacKinney, "The People and Public Opinion in the Eleventh-Century Peace Movement," *Speculum* 3,2 (1930): 181–206; here 201; and then Carl Erdmann, *The Origins of the Idea of the Crusade*, trans. M. W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart (1935; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). A more recent treatment of the issue is found in Tomaz Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> This change in thinking was reflected in the *Song of Roland*, for example, in which a monasticized form of knighthood is framed in positive terms. Later twelfth- and thirteenth-century Arthurian tales also warned of the dangers of "male-female propinquity, whose cure could be found only in the heroic purity of knights such as Percival and Galahad. Freedom from women became the test of a true fighting man." McNamara, *The Herrenfrage*, 17. See also the contributions to this volume by Stacey L. Hahn and Daniel Pigg.

<sup>6</sup> On the issue of crusading as a vocation, see James M. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade: 1213–1221. The Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 54. See especially chapter three, "The Vocation of the Cross." For reference to crusading as a vocation in primary sources see *Ordinacio de predicatione S. Crucis, in Anglia* by Philip of Oxford and several of the sermons of James of Vitry. Concerning the sexual chastity of the crusaders, it is important to note that complete sexual abstinence was expected of people doing penance, such as pilgrims. See James Brundage, "Prostitution, Miscegenation, and Sexual Purity in the First Crusade," *Crusade and Settlement: Papers Read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and Presented to R.C. Smail*. ed. Peter Edbury (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1985), 57–65; here 57. The earliest crusaders understood themselves as pilgrims, albeit armed pilgrims, who through their sufferings were to redeem themselves from the effects of their sins. Because the crusades developed in the context of an armed pilgrimage, the earliest crusading vows were essentially pilgrimage vows. It was not until around the year 1200 that church lawyers began to make clear distinctions between crusading vows and pilgrimage vows. For a further examination

was, according to clerical reformers, an especially important element of the new identity of the crusader who was set apart from other combatants by virtue of their personal holiness. Crusaders could count on divine help in battle so long as they avoided sin and remained pleasing to God. Although clerics pointed to a number of sins crusaders should avoid, they emphasized sexual sins associated with women as particularly offensive to God and having the ability to bring about disaster on the battlefield.

As a result, as I will suggest, the rise of crusading at the end of the eleventh century provided chaste clerics, energized and emboldened in an era of ecclesiastical reform, with a unique opportunity to impose their notion of the ideal Christian warrior onto Christian society through the new and evolving vocation of crusading. Unlike traditional medieval warriors, who in part demonstrated their rugged masculinity through their sexual performance with women, the ideal crusader represented a new type of holy warrior for whom success on the battlefield was dependent on their sexual purity. This resulted in severe consequences for women involved with the crusading movement insofar as concerns over feminine sexuality soon became a chief justification for the exclusion of women from later crusades. Indeed, the presence of women during an unsuccessful crusade, often equated with the presence of sin, seems to have provided many clerics with a convenient explanation for the failure of crusading efforts for which they had previously promised God's support.

## 1. Historians, Women, and Crusading

The topic of women and the crusades has not always been a major area of interest to crusades historians.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the earliest scholarship on the issue was largely driven by those more interested in feminist causes rather than crusading. Perhaps the earliest work to focus exclusively on the topic was by the American feminist

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of the evolution of a crusade and crusading vows, as distinct from a pilgrimage and pilgrimage vows, see James A. Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

<sup>7</sup> By "crusades historians" I am referring essentially to the active membership of the Society for the Study of the Crusades in the Latin East (SSCLE). It is unquestionably the leading scholarly organization for the study of the crusades and boasts roughly 500 members. They publish an annual journal, *Crusades*, which is edited by the world's leading crusades historians, including Jonathan Riley-Smith, Benjamin Z. Kedar, Jonathan Phillips, Christoph T. Maier, and Jaroslav Folda. Certainly, the membership of the SSCLE includes important scholars who have published on topics concerning women and the crusades, such as Jean Richard and James A. Brundage, but, based on their past research, the vast majority generally seem to show little interest in the topic of the present paper.



Celestia Bloss who, in her 1857 book *Heroines of the Crusades*, sought to present inspiring stories of feminine heroism.<sup>8</sup> Throughout much of the early and mid twentieth century, scholarly works that devoted any space to the subject of women on a crusade were often primarily focused on male crusaders, for which an examination of their wives or other women was necessary only sometimes, or on the broader issue of the presence of non-combatants in a crusade, with women as only a subset of the groups they examined.<sup>9</sup> In other cases scholars produced biographical works on specific medieval women that had some connection to the crusading movement, yet the primary focus of such works was rarely on their subject's relationship to the crusades.<sup>10</sup>

It was only in the late twentieth century that serious scholarship devoted exclusively to subjects concerning women and crusading began to emerge. The pioneers of such scholarship began their efforts, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the late 1960s. It was during this period that the historians Jean Richard and James Brundage, who both went on to become leading scholars of the crusades, began publishing on issues concerning women.<sup>11</sup> Richard and Brundage were followed by other historians in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Bernard Hamilton and Maureen Purcell, who also researched issues regarding women during the crusades.<sup>12</sup> Yet

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<sup>8</sup> Celestia Bloss, *Heroines of the Crusades* (Auburn & Rochester: Alden & Beardsley, 1857). See, for example, her closing comments on Eleanora of Castille. She writes, "But her imperishable virtues survive every monumental device, illumine the annals of history, and illustrate the true philosophy of female Heroism" (457).

<sup>9</sup> See early works by Dana C. Munro, "A Crusader," *Speculum* 7, 3 (1932): 321–35; Walter Porges, "The Clergy, the Poor, and the Non-combatants on the First Crusade," *Speculum* 21, 1 (1946): 1–23; and Norman Cohn, "The Appeal of the Crusade to the Poor," *The Crusades, The Crusades, Motives and Achievements*. ed. James A. Brundage. Problems in European Civilization. (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1964), 34–41.

<sup>10</sup> On Eleanor of Aquitaine see, Amy Kelly, *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), W. W. Kibler, ed. *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patron and Politician* (Austin, Texas, University of Texas Press, 1976), and Marion Meade, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography* (New York, Hawthorn, 1977). On Anna Comnena, see Naomi Mitchison, *Anna Comnena* (London: G. Howe, 1928), Georgina Buckler, *Anna Comnena: A Study* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1929); and Rae Dalven, *Anna Comnena* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Jean Richard, "Le Statut de la femme dans l'Orient Latin," *La Femme*, 2: *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l'Histoire Comparative des Institutions* 12 (Brussels: Librairie Encyclopedique, 1962), 377–87. On the efforts of James A. Brundage, see, "The Crusader's Wife: A Canonistic Quandry," *Studia Gratiana* 12 (1967): 425–41; and "The Crusader's Wife Revisted," *Studia Gratiana* 14 (1967): 241–52. He also later explored issues of canon law and sexuality during the crusades in James A. Brundage, "Prostitution in Medieval Canon Law," *Signs* 1 (1976): 825–45, and *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Hamilton, see, "Women in the Crusader States: The Queens of Jerusalem (1100–1190)," *Medieval Women*. ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 143–74; id., "The Titular Nobility of the Latin East: The Case of Agnes of Courtenay," *Crusade and Settlement*, ed. Peter W. Edbury (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1985), 197–203. Maureen Purcell, "Women Crusaders: A Temporary Canonical Aberration?" *Principalities, Powers, and Estates: Studies in Medieval and*

all past efforts were relatively limited in comparison with the amount of important scholarship on women and the crusades that was produced in the 1990s. Historians such as Sarah Lambert and James Powell produced scholarship narrowly focusing on issues such as women during the Fifth Crusade and Queenship in the Latin East.<sup>13</sup> Yet no historian during this time was as prolific as Helen Nicholson, who published important essays on the relations of the military orders with women, the roles of women during the Third Crusade, and, later, devotion to female saints during the crusades.<sup>14</sup>

The intensified study of various issues regarding women and the crusades laid the foundation for more specialized studies on issues of sex and gender during the crusades, issues that have really only been given some consideration in the early twenty-first century. The seminal work in this regard is the 2001 work, *Gendering the Crusades*, edited by Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert, which includes thirteen essays on various topics of gender and sexuality.<sup>15</sup> It is essential reading for anyone considering such issues in relation to the crusades. Perhaps the most impressive work touching on such issues since *Gendering the Crusades* is Sabine Geldsetzer's 2003 book, *Frauen auf Kreuzzügen*.<sup>16</sup> Although Geldsetzer does not focus exclusively on sexuality, instead providing a broad overview of life for women leading up to and during a crusade, she does address the topic and takes account of recent scholarship when doing so.<sup>17</sup>

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*Early Modern Government and Society*, ed. L.O. Frappell (Adelaide: Adelaide University Union Press 1979), 57–67.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Sarah Lambert, "Queen or Consort: Rulership and Politics in the Latin East, 1118–1228," *Queen and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College, London, April 1995*. ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell, 1997), 153–69. See also James M. Powell, "The Role of Women in the Fifth Crusade," *The Horns of Hattin. Proceedings of the Second Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East*. ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar (London: Variorum, 1992), 294–301.

<sup>14</sup> Helen Nicholson, "Templar Attitudes Towards Women," *Medieval History*, 1, 3 (1991): 74–80; eadem, "Women on the Third Crusade," *Journal of Medieval History*, 23, 4 (1997): 335–49. In 2001 she published additional articles, "The Head of St. Euphemia: Templar Devotion to Female Saints," *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales, 2001), 108–20; eadem, "The Military Orders and their Relations with Women," *The Crusades and the Military Orders: Expanding the Frontiers of Medieval Latin Christianity*, ed. Zsolt Hunyadi and József Laszlovsky (Budapest: Central European University, 2001), 407–14.

<sup>15</sup> *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Sabine Geldsetzer, *Frauen auf Kreuzzügen 1096–1291* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Geldsetzer, *Frauen auf Kreuzzügen*, devotes her chapters to addressing particular questions. She asks, for example, who was a crusader; what was the authority of women on a crusade; why did women go on crusades; and how did women live on crusades? So her focus is broad, emphasizing issues of gender, rather than sexuality in general much less the more specific issue of clerical notions of feminine sexuality. She does, however, reference what was essentially the scapegoating of women by clerics in the wake of crusading failures. When crusaders were recruited to the

While scholarship on women and the crusading movement has increased considerably over the last two decades or so, still relatively little has been written that focuses narrowly on the more specific and fascinating subject of feminine sexuality during the crusades.<sup>18</sup> This may be because some consider the pioneering research of James A. Brundage to be definitive. Indeed, his 1985 essay *Prostitution, Miscegenation, and Sexual Purity in the First Crusade*, clearly laid out the issues regarding clerical concerns over feminine sexuality during the First Crusade. Brundage looked broadly at sexual issues during the First Crusade, including the participation of women in the First Crusade and their roles in the crusader army; clerical reactions to sexual activity by the crusaders; inter-marriage of crusaders and non-Latin women; and cross cultural sexual violence during the crusades.<sup>19</sup> While Brundage highlighted several key issues in this work, which laid a foundation for later research on topics involving women and the crusades, he did so in only five and a half pages.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Brundage devoted little more than a page to each of the four major issues he examined and then only looked at the First Crusade, leaving considerable room for further research. Brundage himself later more fully addressed these topics, but focused broadly on Europe rather than just the crusades, in his 1987 book, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*.<sup>21</sup>

For the last twenty years Brundage's works have been the benchmark for understanding clerical concerns about sexuality during the crusades and deservedly so, as they provided an intriguing foundation for further research that no others have fully taken advantage of since then. Yet clearly there are still many issues worthy of a closer examination. For instance, how did clerical concerns about feminine sexuality during the First Crusade compare with such concerns during later crusades? Were there differences? If the presence of women was often associated with failure during a crusade, what was the reaction when women were present for a successful crusade? How did clerics explain, if at all, such an apparent contradiction? Indeed, a fuller exploration of such issues can only improve current understandings of how women were viewed during the crusades

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crusade by crusades preachers, they were assured God was on their side and with his help they should be successful. When crusaders lost battles, the clerics who had previously assured them of God's support had some explaining to do. Clerics then turned the tables on the crusaders and charged them with the defeat by claiming that they must have sinned and their sins were what caused God to withdraw his support. The presence of women on a crusade allowed for such clerics to point to a tangible potential source of sin by crusaders, as time and again clerics ascribed defeat to sexual sins involving women. See Geldsetzer, 107112.

<sup>18</sup> While the thirteen essays found in *Gendering the Crusades*, for example, cover a host of important topics concerning women and the crusades, none of them focus primarily on feminine sexuality. Brundage, *Prostitution*, 57. See f.n. 6 in this essay for a complete reference.

<sup>20</sup> It's a very short essay, ranging from page 57 to 62, with additional notes.

<sup>21</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). See also the contribution to this volume by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux.

as well as in medieval society at large. The answers to such questions undoubtedly begin with considerations of sexuality during the clerical reform movement of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

## 2. The Rise of the Celibate Clergy

The issue of sex, even within marriage, had long been a concern for medieval clerical authors, but this concern reached a high point during the Gregorian reform of the eleventh century.<sup>22</sup> Sex was unclean and defiled both body and soul, making it difficult to reconcile with the highest ideals of the Christian life.<sup>23</sup> These concerns about the sinfulness associated with sex provided the theological justification for the segregation of women from the clergy and were foundational to the rise of the priestly celibacy in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Until this point, although monks were celibate, relatively little had been done to impose celibacy on the secular clergy.

Yet in the eleventh century the reforming Church began to insist on its primacy over the secular state.<sup>24</sup> To argue its primacy, the Church asserted its clergy was purer and better than the laity. Clerical celibacy became central to this claim as clerics increasingly emphasized the potential pitfalls of marriage and the importance of chastity for spiritual purity.<sup>25</sup> The efforts of the reformers

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<sup>22</sup> Jean Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage: A Twelfth Century View* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 69. Although extramarital sex had always been condemned even issues relating to sex within marriage became a concern as prominent authorities taught that marital coitus was tinged with lust and therefore tainted with impurity. See Pierre J. Payer, "Early Medieval Regulations Concerning Marital Sexual Regulations," *Journal of Medieval History* 1 (1980): 353–76; here 370–71. For a broader view of the Gregorian Reform movement, and the development of canon law during this period, see Stanley Chodorow, *Christian Political Theory and Church Politics in the Mid-Twelfth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); and Uta-Renata Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century*, trans. eadem. Middle Ages Series (1982; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Brundage, *Prostitution*, 57. These concerns were amplified by medieval notions of gender that held women had an insatiable sexual appetite while men had a nearly ungovernable sex drive. See McNamara, *The Herrenfrage*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 44.

<sup>25</sup> Karras, *Sexuality*, 43–44. This put enormous pressure on married priests, as well as those who held concubines, often *de facto* wives, to conform to the new and forceful call for a celibate clergy. Karras also notes "Earlier, clerical marriage had been prohibited, but if priests married anyway the marriages were regarded as valid. From the twelfth century on, after clerical celibacy began to be enforced, many writers made a concerted effort to blame these women for polluting the Church and corrupting priests." Karras also notes that priest's concubines were treated as the modern equivalent of "gold diggers," out to despoil the priest of any possessions, as well as threats to the salvation of the priest by means of their sexuality and the lusts they undoubtedly

culminated in a declaration at the First Lateran Council in 1123 that clerical orders were a total impediment to marriage.<sup>26</sup> Thus celibacy became an integral part of a cleric's identity and set up a new ordering of society divided between two groups; chaste clerics and married laity.<sup>27</sup>

An important benefit of a celibate and chaste clergy was increased spiritual strength, especially useful for those engaged in spiritual warfare.<sup>28</sup> Medieval Christian thinkers believed they were no less than soldiers in a cosmic struggle between God and the Devil who by virtue of their faith had an obligation to battle the forces of evil.<sup>29</sup> Yet to battle effectively against demonic forces Christians had to avoid sin as otherwise they would be powerless against demons and risked subjecting themselves to the "fires of the Devil."<sup>30</sup> The power of the Devil could

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inspired. See Karras, *Sexuality*, 100–01.

<sup>26</sup> Charles A. Frazee, "The Origins of Clerical Celibacy in the Western Church," *Church History* Vol. 57, Supplement: Centennial Issue (1988): 108–26; here 126.

<sup>27</sup> See Karras, *Sexuality*, 44–45, 53. Karras notes on page 45, "A look at medieval ways of classifying people indicates how, in the west, the fundamental distinction between clergy and laity was understood in terms of sexuality. The medieval mode of classification with which people are most familiar is probably the division into those who pray, those who fight, and those who work. This division became popular in the eleventh century . . . There were other classification schemes, however, that structured the way people thought about society. One was a simple division between clergy and laity."

<sup>28</sup> The understanding of Christians as spiritual soldiers in a constant war between holy and demonic forces was rooted in the earliest Christian texts. See for example, Revelation 20: 1–10, which notes how God will one day win a complete victory of Satan. Or how Satan, the adversary, seeks to deceive and attack God's people, see Gen. 3:1–15, Job 1:2, John 8:42–47, and Revelation 12. See especially Eph. 6:10–17 (NIV), in which the author used militant language to its fullest expression in advising Christians how to wage spiritual warfare. Indeed, the so-called Desert Fathers, celibate holy men who abandoned the temptations of the world by living in the desert, were believed to have literally wrestled and fought with demons. See, for example, the *Life of St. Anthony*, attributed to St. Athanasius, which records Anthony's physical conflicts with demons in the shape of wild beasts that sometimes left him nearly dead. Their asceticism and chastity, and the holiness that resulted from it, were known to have made them an especially appealing challenge for the Devil and his minions. Indeed, the notion that the Devil is especially driven to harass and test those known for their piety is a major theme in the second book of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great. See especially chapters 16 and 30 of Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, ed. John Zimmerman (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> Consider, for example, the clerical reformer Peter Damien's condemnations of members of the clergy whom he believed tried "to avoid warfare" in "the army of spiritual service." Peter Damian, "Letter to Boniface," *The Crisis of the Church and State: 1050–1300*, ed. and trans. Brian Tierney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 37.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Damian's *The Book of Gomorrah*, written in 1051, contained a diatribe against priests who succumbed to lust and in doing so expelled the Holy Spirit from their minds and bodies and allowed the Devil, "the rouser of lust" to take its place. See chapter 16, *PL*, 145: 175. In a letter written in the same year *The Book of Gomorrah* was published, Pope Leo IX praised Peter's work and noted that clerics who were tainted by "the fourfold pollution of carnal contagion" were cut off from Christ's inheritance and faced the "fires of the devil" whereas "if they lived chastely, the

only be overcome by holy people, and few were considered as holy as those who had renounced sexuality.<sup>31</sup> In this sense the celibate and chaste clergy offered the greatest potential for success in a war with demonic forces, whether against figurative demons of lust or real demons associated with witchcraft and demonic possession.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. The Influence of the Clergy on the Early Crusading Movement

With the rise of the crusading movement at the end of the eleventh century, clerical reformers, who had emphasized the importance of spiritual purity above all, were well positioned to develop and define the movement.<sup>33</sup> Crusading was, from its inception, promoted as a devotional act. As the clergy engaged in spiritual warfare against evil, so would the crusaders engage in physical warfare against evil. Indeed, the First Crusade was framed by Pope Urban II as no less than a battle between the people of God and a people [referring to Muslims] “enslaved by demons.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it was Christ himself, according to crusades preachers, who called on Christians to go to the Holy Land and restore His authority.<sup>35</sup> In the

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might be called . . . the holy temple of God.” The Pope also used the same militant language as Peter, as well as St. Paul, in noting the necessity to “attack vice” and “combat it” in hopes of the “branch of victory.” A full English translation is provided in John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 365–66.

<sup>31</sup> Clerics who had taken vows of chastity were depicted in medieval chronicles as representing an especially appealing challenge to demons who sought to overcome their holiness through force or temptation. In Guibert of Nogent’s *Memoirs*, written in the early twelfth century, he describes several incidents in which those who had recently taken vows of chastity came under both spiritual and physical attack by demons. Guibert notes that for the Christians to defend themselves they had to rely on their spirituality as “spiritual things can only be counteracted by spiritual things” (207). See Guibert of Nogent, *A Monk’s Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*, trans. Paul J. Archambault (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 111–19, 202–08.

<sup>32</sup> It was common in medieval texts describing exorcisms to depict the possessing demon as a small black imp who would leap from the victim’s mouth at the conclusion of a successful exorcism. See Nancy Caciola, “Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Psychology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42, 2 (2000): 268–306; here 281.

<sup>33</sup> Pope Urban II, a former Cluniac monk no less, who had called the First Crusade, was a product of the Gregorian reform and a major advocate of its agenda.

<sup>34</sup> Fulcherio Carnotensi, “Historia Iherosolymitana,” *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Histories occidentaux*, Vol. III (Paris: L’Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1866), 311–440; here 324. “O quantum dedecus si gens tam spreta, degener, et daemonium ancilla, gentum omnipotentis Dei fide praeditam, et Christi nomine fulgidam, sic superaverit.”

<sup>35</sup> Fulcherio Carnotensi, 324: “. . . non ego, sed dominus . . . Praesentibus dico, absentibus mando, Christus autem imperat.”

same way that priests had been called to their vocation by God, and often with the same rhetoric, so too were crusaders called to the service of God.

To be successful on the crusading battlefield, as was the case with clerics on the spiritual battlefield, the crusaders had to avoid sin to insure they remained pleasing to God.<sup>36</sup> In a sense, clerics would help crusaders to form a new identity, in which they had renounced their past and current sins and devoted themselves with singular devotion to God's service.<sup>37</sup> Yet the reformers who had promoted the crusade as a spiritual venture, effectively an armed pilgrimage that included indulgences for the remission of sin, soon found themselves in a dilemma of their own making as they discovered that women also sought the spiritual benefits of crusading.

#### 4. Women and the First Crusade

Because the First Crusade was framed as a pilgrimage, early clerical leaders were hard pressed to prohibit the participation of women, nor did there seem to be much initial concern about doing so. In Pope Urban II's calling of the First Crusade in 1095, he admonished his listeners to repent their previous sins and reminded them that to please God they had to make themselves pleasing to God.<sup>38</sup> Yet the potentially debilitating effects of sinful women seem not to have been considered at this early point. While Urban offered a lengthy list of sins the crusaders should

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<sup>36</sup> The notion that Christian armies won in battle only when they were pleasing to God dated back to Constantine the Great. It was believed that the true Christian warrior, who fought with a sincere heart, pure motives, and avoided sin, could be assured of God's favor on the battlefield. As a result, numerous military victories by Merovingian, Carolingian, and other medieval Christian armies in the centuries leading up to the crusades were consistently attributed to God favor. Conversely, when awowedly Christian armies lost on the battlefield, the reverse was assumed true; as such defeats were commonly attributed to the sins of the defeated army and understood as a form of chastisement by God. Such thinking dominated the crusading era. James of Vitry, for example, the influential thirteenth century Bishop of Acre, referenced the Muslim military commander Saladin as a "scourge of God" sent to punish the sins of Latin Christians in the Holy Land. See Jacques de Vitry, "The History of Jerusalem," *The Library of the Palestine Pilgrims Text Society* Vol. 11, trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: Hanover Street, 1895), 94–95.

<sup>37</sup> If, as Ruth Karras, *Sexuality*, 45, argues, the rise of clerical celibacy had essentially divided medieval European society into a chaste clergy and a married laity, with each group expressing their masculinity differently concerning matters of sex, then the crusaders were then something of a hybrid of the two. Many of them were married, yet while on a crusade they had taken vows not unlike the clergy, including the vow of chastity.

<sup>38</sup> Fulcherio Carnotensi, *Historia*, 322. "Si quidem amici Dei esse vultis, libenter exercete quae ei placere sentitis."

avoid, there was no reference to the sinful effects of women.<sup>39</sup> To the contrary, sympathetic feminine imagery was an integral part of the Pope's speech. In the version of Urban's speech written by the monk Robert of Rheims, all Christians were cast as undeserving victims of Muslim aggression, but especially women who suffered from rape.<sup>40</sup> According to the same account, Urban also invoked the imagery of rape when he described the Holy City of Jerusalem as a maiden in need of rescue.<sup>41</sup> With these powerful images of abuse, the Pope stirred the sympathy of his listeners, especially those knights "steeped in a culture of militant Christianity"<sup>42</sup>

It was widely assumed that anyone could participate in a crusade, even women, so long as a male relative accompanied them.<sup>43</sup> As a result, large numbers of poor

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<sup>39</sup> Fulcherio Carnotensi, *Historia*, 322–23. The list includes simony, heresy, secular authority over the Church, the physical abuse of clergy, thieves, arsonists, and those who use their wealth unwisely.

<sup>40</sup> Roberti Monarchi, "Historia Iherosolimitana," *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Histories occidentaux*. Vol. III (Paris: L'Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1866), 728. "Quid dicam de nefanda mulierum constupratione, de qua loqui deterius est quam silere?" For a lengthier analysis of Urban's speech at Clermont see Dana Carlton Munro's various works, including "The Speech of Pope Urban II. At Clermont, 1095," *The American Historical Review*, 11:2 (1906): 231–42. Or, eadem, "Papal Proclamation of the Crusade," *The Crusades: Motives and Achievements*. ed. James Brundage (Lexington: Heath, 1964), 7–11. Munro cites Pope Urban's speech as among the most important events of the entire crusading movement.

<sup>41</sup> Roberti Monarchi, "Historia Iherosolimitana," 729: "Iherusalem umbilicus est terrarum, terra prae ceteris fructifera, quasi alter Paradisus deliciarum. Hanc redemptor humani generis suo illustravit adventu, decoravit conversatione, sacravit passione, morte redemit, sepultura insignivit. Haec igitur civitas regalis, in orbis medio posita, nunc a suis hostibus captiva tenetur, et ab ignorantibus Deum ritui gentium ancillatur. Quaerit igitur et optat liberari, et ut ei subveniatis non cessat imprecari. A vobis quidem praecipue exigit subsidium, quoniam a Deo vobis collatum est prae cunctis nationibus, ut jam diximus, insigne decus armorum. Arripite igitur viam hanc in remissionem peccatorum vestrorum, securi de immarcescibili Gloria regni coelprum."

<sup>42</sup> St. Louis University historian Thomas Madden described the reaction to Urban's preaching as follows, "For knights steeped in a culture of militant Christianity, these were stories to make the blood boil. The shouts of Europe's fighting men, filled with righteous anger, rang out across the land: 'God wills it! God wills it!'" Thomas Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham: Rowman, 1999), 9. The threat of rape, in general, was significant for many women in the Middle Ages. Jane Schulenburg, examines this issue in her work, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society: 500–1500* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 127–76. She notes the extensive efforts to safeguard women who sought to remain chaste. An extreme aspect of this phenomenon was the self-inflicted disfigurement of holy women by cutting off their noses in an effort to no longer appear desirable to potential invaders.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 35. Riley-Smith notes, "... he [Pope Urban II] aimed his message specifically at knights and tried to limit the crusade to them, and to the fact that since it was a pilgrimage it was impossible for him to prevent women, children, the old and the sick vowing to go if they were determined enough... A rich noble woman called Emerias of Alteias took the cross and went to ask her bishop for his blessing before her departure. He suggested that it would be better for her to establish a hospice to care for the poor. She agreed to this commutation of her



non-combatants, including women, joined early expeditions to the East.<sup>44</sup> While we have records of tearful good-byes between crusaders and their wives, there were also women who joined their husbands on crusade.<sup>45</sup> Other women accompanied other male relatives, or went as camp followers, laundresses, or even prostitutes.<sup>46</sup>

## 5. Emerging Clerical Concerns over the Presence of Women

Although women participated in the First Crusade with apparently little initial objection, even winning limited praise for their early efforts, clerical concerns over the presence of women more clearly manifested themselves once the crusaders began to experience set-backs.<sup>47</sup> One of the earliest and most significant instances of military disappointment and concern for the crusaders resulted from a protracted and bloody battle at Antioch. At one point, priests dressed in white begged God to show mercy and let them defeat their Muslim opponents as they encouraged crusaders to confess their sins.<sup>48</sup> The clergy then led crusaders in

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vow, but it is noteworthy that she seems to have had little difficulty in making it in the first place and it was only the bishop who was able to persuade her to change her mind."

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 69. Also, for a dated but still valuable examination of non-combatants in the Crusades, see Walter Porges "The Clergy, The Poor, and the Non-combatants on the First Crusade," *Speculum* 21, 1 (1946): 1-23. The author notes that by no means was the First Crusade thought of as a purely military affair, but as a spiritual one open to non warriors. Over time, as will be examined in this essay, the Crusades became much more professionalized with clerical leaders seeking the exclusion of many non-combatants, especially women.

<sup>45</sup> Fulcherio Carnotensi, *Historia*, 328: "O quantus erat dolor! quanta suspiria! quot ploratus! quot lamenta inter amicos! quum maritus uxorem suam delinqueret sibi valde dilectam."

<sup>46</sup> Keren Caspi-Reisfeld, "Women Warriors during the Crusades, 1095-1254," *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 96-97.

<sup>47</sup> As the first crusader armies arrived in the East and began to engage their enemies, they experienced some early successes. In one incident, the actions of women even received unusual praise from the anonymous lay chronicler of the *Gesta Francorum*, who following the success of the crusaders' victory at Dorylaeum, noted, "Feminae quoque nostrae in illa die fuerunt nobis in maximo refugio, quae afferebant ad bibendum aquam nostris preliatoribus, et fortiter semper confortabant illos, pugnantes et defendentes," Anonymous, *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, ed. Rosalind Hill (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), 19.

<sup>48</sup> Miriam Rita Tessera argues that many crusaders believed they were crusading not only against the sins of the Muslims, but, more importantly, their own sins as well. Her argument works well with the numerous crusades sources that reference clerical condemnations of sin, such as at Antioch during the First Crusade, as the sole cause of defeat. See her work, "Phillip Count of Flanders and Hildegard of Bingen: Crusading against the Saracens or Crusading against Deadly Sin," *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 77-93.

processions, prayers, and fasting.<sup>49</sup> Following these penitential acts, the discouraged crusaders and clerics gathered together to discuss the reason it was taking them so long to conquer the city. According to the eyewitness account of the priest Fulcher of Chartres, they agreed that God must have still been unhappy with them and was punishing them for their sins by prolonging their final victory.<sup>50</sup> They came to the conclusion that to purify their forces, they needed to expel the women, both married and unmarried, from their camps. Fulcher listed no practical concerns for the expulsion of the women; only that this action was taken in case they had displeased the Lord through "the sordidness of riotous living."<sup>51</sup>

After sending away the women, the fortunes of the crusaders did indeed seem to improve as a short time later they captured nearly all of the city of Antioch with only the exception of a well-defended citadel. Yet with the late arrival of a relief force that had been sent to aid the city's Muslim defenders, the besiegers found themselves under siege as they struggled to defend their gains from a fresh and powerful Muslim army. In this predicament, the crusaders again searched for the source of their misfortune. After all, they had dismissed the "sinful" women from their camps and were again having problems. However, quick thinking clerics determined that women were again the cause of their misfortune. This time they believed it was because crusaders, once they had entered Antioch after dismissing their women, were then charmed into consorting with "unlawful" local women. As a result of these sins, they believed God had "doubled" their punishment.<sup>52</sup>

Another eyewitness account of the siege of Antioch also attributes the problems of the crusaders to their misdeeds with "evil women." The anonymous author of the *Gesta Francorum* describes an incident in which a priest had a vision of Jesus. Jesus complained to the priest that the crusaders' evil pleasures with Christian and pagan women had caused an *immensus foetor ascendit in caelum* and were indeed the cause of their misfortunes.<sup>53</sup> Jesus imposed five days of prayer on the crusaders as a penance for their sins and, if this was done, he promised divine aid. Shortly later, in what must have seemed a confirmation that repentance for sins involving

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<sup>49</sup> Raymond D' Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, trans. John Hugh Hill and Laurita Hill (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1968), 54.

<sup>50</sup> Fulcherio Carnotensi, *Historia*, 340: "Haec autem incommoda putabamus sic Francis propter peccata sua contingere, et quod urbem tam longo tempore non poterant capere: quos quidam tam luxuria quam avaritia sive superbia vel rapina vitiabat."

<sup>51</sup> Fulcherio Carnotensi, *Historia*, 340: "Tunc facto deinde consilio, eegerunt feminas de exercita tam maritatas quam immaritatas, ne forte luxuriae sordibus inquinati Domino displicerent."

<sup>52</sup> Fulcherio Carnotensi, *Historia*, 345: "Quibus visis, non minus solito iterum Franci sunt desolati, quia, propter peccata sua poena est eis duplicata."

<sup>53</sup> *Gesta Francorum*, 58: "Ecce in auxilio oportuno, misi uos sanos et incolumes in ciuitatem, et ecce multam prauamque delictionem operantes cum Christianis et prauis paganis mulieribus, unde immensus foetor ascendit in caelum."

women had indeed been necessary for success, the repentant and obedient crusaders were victorious.

The surprising victory at Antioch seemed to vindicate those clerics who had argued that sexual immorality was indeed the cause of the crusaders' problems and that the expulsion of the women was the key to winning God's favor. While concerns about the presence of women may have been lacking during preparations for the First Crusade, the events at Antioch marked an important turning point in how clerics viewed the involvement of women and the potentially devastating effects of feminine sexuality on the crusader's ability to fulfill their mission. After the battle for Antioch, instructions were sent to the West that all non-combatants, including women, should remain at home.<sup>54</sup> A considerable number of clerical accounts appeared after the First Crusade that emphasized that sins commonly associated with women were the cause of any setbacks. The cleric Raymond of Aguilers, for example, retold the story of how the apostles Andrew and Peter appeared to Peter Bartholomew at Antioch to warn him that the Crusaders were having problems because of adultery.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the priest Albert of Aix wrote, "... the Lord is believed to have been against the pilgrim [crusader] who had sinned by excessive impurity and fornication."<sup>56</sup>

The apparent enthusiasm of the clergy to frame any misfortunes of the crusaders as ultimately attributable to the presence of women is perhaps best understood through a careful analysis of the account of the impassioned Benedictine monk Guibert of Nogent. As a monk excessively worried about the sinful effects of sexuality, Guibert stressed the value of chastity as essential to the crusaders' success.<sup>57</sup> He began by framing the efforts of the crusaders as the work of God against Muslims who were inspired by the Devil. He portrayed the mores of the Muslims, for example, as the antithesis of the idealized values of the chaste crusaders, noting that Muhammad had written the Qur'an only to provide a "new license for random copulation."<sup>58</sup> He attributed the worst sorts of sexual sins to

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<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading: 1095–1274* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 44. See also W. Porges, *The Clergy, the Poor, and the Non-Combatants*, 13–14.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond D' Aguilers, *Historia*, 76–77.

<sup>56</sup> Alberti Aquensis, "Historia Hierosolymitana," *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Histories occidentales*, Vol. IV, (Paris: L'Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1879), 295: "Hic manus Domini contra peregrinos esse creditur qui nimiis immunditiis et fornicario concubitu in conspectus ejus peccaverant . . ."

<sup>57</sup> As Robert Levine notes in the introduction to Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God through the Franks: A Translation of Guibert of Nogent's Gesta Dei per Francos*. trans. Robert Levine (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 2, Guibert was both "fascinated and horrified by sexuality". Similarly, James Brundage notes that Guibert "suffered from a deep seated horror of sex in all its forms." See also Brundage, *Prostitution*, 59.

<sup>58</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Deeds of God*, 34.

Muslims noting they had enslaved Christian virgins and made them public prostitutes. But even worse was the Muslim rape of men, including an elderly Christian bishop no less, who died from the abuse.<sup>59</sup> Of course the root of all of this could be traced back to the Devil's seduction of Muhammad.<sup>60</sup>

Guibert was equally harsh on Christians who succumbed to lust during the crusade. He wrote approvingly of the strict measures the crusades leadership took against sexual immorality, noting that sexual crimes were punished with particular severity, and this was just. Guibert pointed out, for example, how if any of the unmarried women was found to be pregnant, she and her pimp were submitted to severe punishments. He also told the story of a monk caught in a compromising situation with a woman resulting in both of them being beaten with whips.<sup>61</sup> Yet according to Guibert, brutal enforcement measures were not always needed, as during times of danger, when the crusaders were most fearful of death at the hands of their enemy, such an atmosphere was enough to restrain the crusaders' lusts; "Unde fiebat ut ibi nec mentio seorti nec nomen prostibuli toleraretur haberi: praesertim quum pro hoc ipso scelere gladiis gentilium verentur addici" ("So it happened that merely speaking of a prostitute or of a brothel was considered intolerable, and they [crusaders] feared dying beneath the swords of the pagans if they committed such a crime").<sup>62</sup> In light of such views, it is not surprising that Guibert had high praise for the crusader King Baldwin of Jerusalem who put his wife in a convent to avoid the temptations of the flesh.<sup>63</sup>

It is curious to note that excessive clerical concerns about the sinful effects of the presence of women during the First Crusade were recorded in the wake of what was, by all accounts, a stunning success for the crusaders. The crusaders had, after all, achieved all their major goals, including providing military aid to the Byzantines and helping to restore many lands and cities to Byzantine control. Perhaps most important for the crusaders, they had returned Jerusalem to Christian control and established what they hoped would be a permanent presence in the Holy Land. As women took considerable heat for their presence

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<sup>59</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Deeds of God*, 37. Guibert is likely borrowing this story from the text of the well circulated so-called, "Letter of Alexius to Count Robert of Flanders," which purports to be a letter from the Byzantine Emperor describing the sufferings of Eastern Christians at the hands of Muslims. While the letter that survives in its current form is believed to be a very early forgery, it is possible the letter was based on a genuine original that no longer survives. See Einor Joranson, "The Problem of the Spurious Letter of Emperor Alexius to the Court of Flanders," *The American Historical Review* 55, 4 (1950): 811–32.

<sup>60</sup> Guibert of Nogent, 33.

<sup>61</sup> Guibert of Nogent, 87–88.

<sup>62</sup> Guiberti Abbatis, "Gesta Dei per Francos," *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Histories occidentaux*, Vol. IV (Paris: L'Academie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, 1879), 182. The English translation is taken from Levine's translation of Guibert of Nogent, 87–88.

<sup>63</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Gesta Dei*, 164–65.

during a highly successful crusade, one wonders what might have been the reaction if the First Crusade had actually failed? The Second Crusade would provide the answer.

## 6. Continued Concerns during the Second Crusade

In his calling of the Second Crusade, Pope Eugenius III cited the recent Muslim reconquest of Edessa in 1144 as a sure sign that God was displeased with the sins of Christians.<sup>64</sup> God had punished Christians by allowing for their defeat and Eugenius proclaimed the proper remedy was a new expedition of God-fearing and holy crusaders to go to the East and rectify the situation. In fact the most prominent leader of the Second Crusade, French King Louis VII, had been hailed as just such a man.<sup>65</sup> Yet after much fanfare accompanying the launch of the crusade, by the time it was over, the crusaders had little to show for their massive sacrifices in life, money, and effort, and the whole venture was widely viewed as a debacle.

Numerous clerical writers and preachers who had advocated the crusade unexpectedly found themselves the target of sometimes vitriolic criticism.<sup>66</sup> No less a figure than St. Bernard, perhaps the most popular and influential preacher of the twelfth-century, felt compelled to offer an *apologia* for his support of the crusade.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Eugenius III, *Quantum Praedecessores* (Patrologia Latina, Vol. 180, ed. J. P. Migne [Paris: Migne, 1855], 1064–65.

<sup>65</sup> Odo of Deuil, "Letter to His Venerable Abbot Suger," *De Profectione Ludovici VII in Orientem: The Journey of Louis VII to the East*, trans. Virginia Gingerick Berry (New York: W. W. Norton, 1948), 3.

<sup>66</sup> In reference to the disastrous events of the Second Crusade, the anonymous annalist of Würzburg wrote, "God allowed the Western church, on account of its sins, to be cast down." The clerical preachers and writers who had called for the expedition would have agreed with the author up to this point. For them, God's punishment for men's sins was the most convincing explanation for the failure of the crusaders. Yet such clerics would have found the analyst's later commentary troubling; however, as he went on to list the clerics as the sinners and their preaching of the crusade as the sin. He referred to the crusades preachers as "pseudo prophets, sons of Belial, and witnesses of anti-Christ, who seduced the Christians with empty words" and "by vain preaching to set out against the Saracens in order to liberate Jerusalem" and that their preaching "... was so enormously influential that the inhabitants of nearly every region, by common vows, offered themselves freely for common destruction." The original text is found in *Annales Herbipolenses*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores, xvi (Hanover: Hahn, 1859). The English translation provided here is taken from Anonymous, "Annales Herbipolenses, s.a. 1147: A Hostile View of the Crusade," trans. James Brundage, *The Crusades: A Documentary Survey* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1962), 115–21.

<sup>67</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Consideratione Libri Quinque*. Patrologia Latina, Vol. 182, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1862), 741–45.

Yet many clerical chroniclers rejected such criticism and, in the tradition of their predecessors, instead found ways to connect the failure of the crusade to sexual immorality with women. William of Newburgh, for example, attributed the origins of the disastrous Second Crusade, which began with the fall of the crusader state of Edessa in 1144, to the lust of its naive governor, Jocelin II. According to William, the father of an Armenian girl who had been raped by Jocelin, sought his revenge by betraying the city to the Turks and making possible Edessa's capture.<sup>68</sup> The late twelfth-century Archbishop William of Tyre made similar claims about Jocelin's inattention to his duties resulting from his pursuit of pleasure, as did the early thirteenth-century Bishop of Acre, James de Vitry.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in his *History of Jerusalem*, James argued that all of the problems of Latin Christians living in the Holy Land up until his time began with Jocelin II. After presenting a lengthy list of regions and cities that had been conquered or re-conquered by Muslims since the First Crusade, he noted that all the problems of the crusading states in the Holy Land began with events in the county of Edessa, where Joscelin II's reported debauchery had led to the fall of Edessa.<sup>70</sup>

Rumors particularly circulated about the misconduct of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine who accompanied her husband Louis VII during the crusade. From the outset, some speculated that Louis may have brought her because he feared her infidelity if he left her alone in France.<sup>71</sup> Louis's strategy may have been unsuccessful, as the cleric William of Tyre lamented how Eleanor "disregarded her marriage vows and was unfaithful to her husband."<sup>72</sup> Eleanor's presence during

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<sup>68</sup> William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs: Book One*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh and M. J. Kennedy (Wiltshire, England: Aris & Phillips, 1988), 84–86: "Quo in regem Ierosolymitanum post fratrem Godefridum sublimite, principatus Edissensus per alios strenueadministratus est usque ad Jocelinum, cujus lubrici hominis petulantia atque libidine actum est ut civitas Christianae religionis titulo fere per nongentos annos insignis in manus Turcorum et sacrae fidei exterminium unius civis perfidy proditione traderetur. Is erat genere Armenius, ejusdem civitatis civis indigena, et jure hereditario habitabat in quadam turri muro conjuncta. Hujus filiam praenominatus civitatis princeps formae captus illecebra, vi abstraxit et stupor polluit. Ille filiam dehonestatam dolens, et astute dissimulatam doloris magnitudinem ut de uno ulcisceretur ad multorum perniciem trahens, nocte sacratissima Dominicae Nativitatis, cum sacrae in ecclesiis more Christiano celebrarentur vigiliae, invitatos pactis clandestinis Turcos intromisit in civitatem."

<sup>69</sup> William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, ed. and trans. Emily Babcock and A. C. Krey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 53. William noted, "... he was yet given to excessive revelry and drunkenness. He was devoted to licentiousness and uncleanness of the flesh to the point of infamous notoriety ... and in punishment for his sins, this Jocelin [III] lost the entire land over which his father had ruled so ably ..."

<sup>70</sup> Jacques de Vitry, *History*, 93.

<sup>71</sup> Frank McMinn Chambers, "Some Legends Concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine," *Speculum* 16, 4 (1941): 459–68; here 459.

<sup>72</sup> William of Tyre, 180–81.

the crusade would have been bad enough, but she appears to have inspired many other women to accompany their husbands. William of Newburgh was especially distraught at this development and later complained that the situation made the army unchaste and undisciplined.<sup>73</sup> Eleanor's allegedly scandalous behavior during the Second Crusade caused such a stir that it was recalled with horror several years later by chroniclers of the Third Crusade.<sup>74</sup>

## 7. Feminine Sexuality and the Later Crusades

The clerical reaction to the Second Crusade demonstrated two things; first, clerics were not willing to take the blame for its failure. That they attempted to shift the blame to women is perhaps revealing of how acceptable they understood negative views of women's sexuality to have been at the time. Second, clerical attacks on women after the Second Crusade suggested that women would never be able to prove their worth on a crusade. They had, after all, been present in considerable numbers for the stunningly successful First Crusade, as well as the demoralizing Second Crusade. Yet the clerical reaction to their presence was the same in both cases. Women, on account of their sexuality, were a constant threat to the chastity of the crusaders and, therefore, the success of a crusade.

Indeed, clerical fear and hostility to the presence of women that developed during the First and Second Crusades became the guiding principle of how clerics viewed women in subsequent crusades. Clerical authors expressed as high, or higher, a level of concern over the presence of women on the Third Crusade as

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<sup>73</sup> William of Newburgh, *History*, 128: "quod exemplum secuti multi alii nobiles uxores suas secum duxerunt; quibus cum cubiculariae deesse non possent, in castris illis Christianis, quae casta esse oportebat, feminarum multitudo versabatur. Quod utique factum est exercitui nostro in scandalum, ut superius ostensum est."

<sup>74</sup> The twelfth century English Monk, Richard of Devizes, in his account of the Third Crusade, provides a flattering, and perhaps self-serving, description of the king's mother, Eleanor. Although Eleanor had been the cause of scandal during the Second Crusade, in this account, she is a "matchless woman, beautiful and chaste, powerful and modest, meek and eloquent . . ." Yet he follows by alluding to past accusations of infidelity on the part of Eleanor when he warns his readers, "Many knew, what I wish that none of us had known. The same queen, in the time of her former husband went to Jerusalem. Let none speak more thereof; I also know well. Be silent," Richard of Devizes, "Chronicles of Richard of Devizes, Concerning the Deeds of King Richard the First, King of England," *Chronicles of the Crusades, Being Contemporary Narratives of the Crusade of Richard Coeur de Lion, by Richard of Devizes and Geoffrey de Vinsauf; and of the Crusade of Saint Louis, by Lord Jean De Joinville*, trans. J. A. Giles (New York: AMS, 1969), 19–20. Giles based his translation on a Latin edition of Richard's *Chronicle*, first published by the English Historical Society (London, 1838) and reprinted in 1964. See Richard and Joseph Stevenson, *Chronicon*. (Vaduz: Kraus Reprint, 1964).

their predecessors in the First and Second Crusades.<sup>75</sup> Several measures were taken in 1188 to restrict the number of female camp followers. The Councils of Geddington and Le Mans expressly forbade any woman except laundresses, who were deemed above suspicion, to go on the Third Crusade.<sup>76</sup> As a result, only elderly or unattractive women were permitted to participate.<sup>77</sup>

Similar attempts to limit the presence of women during the Fourth Crusade included an effort by a papal legate to dismiss all women from the expedition while still in Venice.<sup>78</sup> Yet in the era of the Fourth Crusade, crusading was beginning to evolve from its pilgrimage roots into something more akin to typical military expeditions.

As a result, fewer and fewer women participated, so they became less of a concern to clerical writers. Additionally, clerical authorities presented appealing alternatives to convince women to stay home. Pope Innocent III, for example, in the early thirteenth-century instructed crusades preachers to administer the cross to all, including women, without regard to their suitability for the crusade, but in doing so he intended to have them later redeem their crusading vows for a cash donation.<sup>79</sup> The redemption of crusading vows from unsuitable crusaders, particularly women, who were allowed to redeem their vows on the basis of their sex alone, provided a windfall for the Fifth Crusade and allowed women to gain

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<sup>75</sup> The clerical writer perhaps the most reflective of clerical views of women during the Third Crusade was Ralph Niger. He argued that the women who accompanied the crusaders served as the "snare of the Devil" (Ecclesiastes 7:27) and worried that their presence might bring disaster to the Crusaders. To support his claims Niger cited the Biblical example of the Midianite woman who was killed by the Israelites in order to prevent sin in their army and thus avoid defeat (Numbers 25: 6–11). For such reasons, Niger argued that women should not be present on major military campaigns and that women should not participate in a crusade. See Ralph Niger, *De re militari et triplici peregrinationis Ierosolimitane*. ed. Ludwig Schmugge (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 227. See also pages 154 and 223.

<sup>76</sup> Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*, 45.

<sup>77</sup> Caspi-Reisfeld, *Women Warriors*, 97. "However, these washerwomen had to be old and physically unattractive in order not to arouse the men, who ostensibly had disengaged themselves from the women in their close environment. Another important task these women assumed was the removal of lice from the soldiers' heads. No skills except unattractive looks were necessary for this function." The twelfth century poet/chronicler Ambroise describes this situation in his account of the Third Crusade. He notes, "Because the women all refrained from going; in Acre they remained, save for the good old dames who toiled, and dames who washed the linen soiled and laved the heads of pilgrims—these were good as apes for picking flees." See Ambroise, *The Crusade of Richard the Lionheart by Ambroise*, ed. and trans. M. J. Hubert and J. L. La Monte (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 233.

<sup>78</sup> Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*, 46.

<sup>79</sup> Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 93.



the spiritual benefits of crusading without accompanying men to the Holy Land.<sup>80</sup> Although references to women, and by extension to the threat of feminine sexuality, are considerably reduced in later sources, they do not disappear entirely. Indeed, during Louis IX's crusade to the East in 1248, Jean de Joinville recorded how the King dismissed a large number of crusaders believed to have interacted with prostitutes.<sup>81</sup> When Joinville asked the King why he discharged so many crusaders, Louis responded by linking the "debaucheries" of those crusaders with the "suffering" and "misery" of the army.<sup>82</sup>

## 8. Conclusion: Concerns about Feminine Sexuality in the Pre-Modern and Modern World

Because crusades theorists understood military success or failure as wholly dependent on the state of the Christian warriors' relationship with God, enormous efforts were made by a dedicated and reformed clergy to insure the personal holiness of each Christian warrior before battle. Indeed, clerics would often fan out among the army to say mass, hear confessions, and absolve warriors of their sins before battle. Prior to the crusades, or during sometimes lengthy periods of downtime between battles while on a crusade, the same clerics would warn warriors to be mindful of their actions and avoid sins at all times to insure their ultimate success. That such a view would lead to concerns over the presence of women on a crusade is unsurprising. Especially in light of medieval clerical thought on the threat of feminine sexuality to one's salvation. The combination of these two dominant socio-cultural paradigms, that personal holiness was essential to military success and that feminine sexuality was among the gravest threats to personal holiness, which merged during a period of intensive religious reform, provided powerful and convincing arguments in favor of clerical fears over the presence of women on a crusade and insured the creation of a hostile environment

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<sup>80</sup> Constance M. Rousseau, "Homefront and Battlefield: The Gendering of Papal Crusading Policy (1095–1221)," *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales, 2001), 36–37. This is an argument later picked up, or paralleled, by Felix Fabri for his *Sionpilger*; cf. Albrecht Classen, "Imaginary Experience of the Divine: Felix Fabri's *Sionspilger* Late-Medieval Pilgrimage Literature as a Window into Religious Mentality," *Studies in Spirituality* 15 (2005): 109–28.

<sup>81</sup> Jean de Joinville, *Life of St. Louis*, 207.

<sup>82</sup> Jean de Joinville, *Life of St. Louis*, 207: "When I asked him why he had done this, he told me that he had found out for certain that those he had discharged from his army had gathered for their debaucheries at a place no more than a short stone's throw from his own pavilion, and that at a time when the army as a whole was suffering the greatest distress and misery it had ever known."

throughout the crusading era for those women who had been bold enough to take part.

What is perhaps most fascinating about this area of study is the degree to which concerns about the mixing of women and warfare have carried over into the modern West. Clearly a similar fear of feminine sexuality as exhibited by twelfth- and thirteenth-century clerical leaders during the crusades lives on in various forms in the present. Some modern military branches of western nations still segregate men and women. U.S. Marine Corps recruit training, for example, is strictly segregated to the point that a young male recruit might never lay eyes on a woman during nearly three months of boot camp.<sup>83</sup> Concerns over the possibility of inappropriate sexual behavior are among the chief reasons commonly given for such segregation. Yet a number of effective modern fighting forces including, for example, the U.S. Army and Israeli Army seem to have few concerns over the issue as their forces are not segregated.<sup>84</sup>

On a related note, concerns about feminine sexuality have also carried over into athletics. It is a well known convention, for example, that boxers should avoid sexual activities with women the night before a fight so that they can "keep their legs." Perhaps the most popular manifestations of this phenomenon to make it into film are found in the Sylvester Stallone and Robert DeNiro films *Rocky* (1976) and *Raging Bull* (1980), where in both cases the lead characters take precautions to avoid sexual contact with women before fights. Robert Deniro, playing the famous American boxer Jake Lamotta, goes as far as to pour icewater on his genitals to cool his passions. Whether its crusaders worried about God's wrath, modern soldiers worried about unit cohesion, or athletes worried about maintaining their strength, the issue of feminine sexuality seems to have always been a concern for combative men.

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<sup>83</sup> As a former U.S. Marine who attended boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina in the summer of 1990, I recall that I was nearly two months into my three months of training before I had any sort of interaction with a woman. When I did it was due to dental work I had done at the base hospital and a female dental assistant was present. At the completion of three months of boot camp I then attended a Marine Combat Training course which was mandatory for male Marines, but forbidden to female Marines. I also recall that this was when I first became associated with the myth that "saltpeter" (potassium nitrate) was placed in our food during training to control our sexual appetites, a common and prevailing myth in Marine Corps boot camp. So far as I know there is no evidence to substantiate this claim.

<sup>84</sup> Unlike the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Army has generally abandoned segregation of the sexes and now places men and women together in the same platoons and barracks during Army basic training. Yet they still limit some units, such as their highly regarded Special Forces and Ranger units, to men only. The Israeli Army does not, perhaps on account of their small population and correspondingly small number of potential recruits, segregate their men and women even in combat units.



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## The Sexual Lives of Medieval Norman Clerics: A New Perspective on Clerical Sexuality

In November 1260, Walter, the priest of the Norman village Bray-sous-Baudemont, was summoned before the synod of the French Vexin in order to answer to a multitude of charges stemming from his errant behavior. He had been accused of many crimes, but the charges most noticeable were the numerous allegations of sexual misconduct with several women. He admitted that he had kept a concubine, but that he had put her aside. He confessed to being the father of three children by the same mother. He confessed to living with a woman named Cretelot, and having sex with another, unnamed woman within the prior two weeks. He also admitted living with a prostitute for a while. In addition, he performed the marriage of another prostitute, whom he had “known” and whom other priests in the vicinity had also “known.” Walter was officially removed from his parish.<sup>1</sup>

Walter’s case raises the twin issues of sexuality and celibacy within the lives of medieval clerics. Historians have previously assumed that removing sexuality from the lives of clerics precipitated a sort of “crisis” in masculine identity. With the advent of Gregorian reform, celibate men assumed positions of power, and this power was predicated on excluding women. Jo Ann McNamara has argued that removing women from the realm of men led to an “ungendered definition of man.” Furthermore, she asserted that this removal of women deprived men of the

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<sup>1</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS Latin 1245; in this essay, I will be using the printed, Latin edition by Thèodore Bonnin, *Regestrum visitationum archiepiscopi Rothomagensis: Journal des visites pastorals d'Eudes Rigaud, archevêque de Rouen, 1248-1269* (Rouen: Auguste Le Brument, 1852), 379.

"objects" used for masculine demonstration.<sup>2</sup> Following her lead, R. W. Swanson argued that such emphasis on celibacy placed clerics in an ambivalent third gender, or a condition he dubbed "emasculinity."<sup>3</sup> Yet the medieval clergy had far more avenues for expressing masculine power beyond sexuality, and yet sexuality itself was a component of clerical masculinity. In my previous research, I have argued that clerical misbehavior should be seen as gendered behavior rather than being dismissed as cases of ignorance, immorality or worse, fiction.<sup>4</sup> Yet, sexuality did play a role in the lives of medieval clerics, in a variety of ways. The medieval clergy did use sexuality to express masculinity, and this could occur by priests partnering with concubines or cloistered monastics facing and surmounting the challenge of their sexual desires. Sexuality was a component of masculinity, even for celibate men.

Walter of Bray-sous-Baudemont fits the profile of the sexually licentious priest, one found in the *exempla* and *fabliaux* of the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> He was a stereotype and yet his case is not extraordinary. Odo Rigaldus, the Archbishop of Rouen (1248-1275) recorded numerous cases of misbehaving monks and priests in his diocese while visiting these parishes over a course of twenty-one years. In this essay, I will specifically consider the sexual behavior of Norman clerics and what such behavior signifies for the construction of a clerical masculine identity.

Beginning in the eleventh century, the reforming Church began the process of defining what it meant to be a "man of the Church." While cloistered monastics had always taken vows of celibacy, a new effort was made to impose celibacy upon the secular clergy, particularly those in the major orders of subdeacon, deacon, and priest. Rather than emasculating the clergy by these measures, as

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<sup>2</sup> Jo Ann McNamara, "The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050-1150," *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara. Medieval Cultures, 7 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 5.

<sup>3</sup> R. W. Swanson, "Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation," *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, edited by D. M. Hadley. Women and Men in History (New York and London: Longman, 1999), 160-77.

<sup>4</sup> I use the term "clerical masculinity" to refer to the model of masculine behavior prescribed by ecclesiastical reformers for the clergy, and the fulfillment of that model by clerics. Not all clerics behaved according to this appropriate model of manliness. As I have previously argued, many parish priests adopted the secular masculine behavior, of the sort exemplified by non-clerics in medieval society. For this argument, see Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, "Man of the Church or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy," *Gender and History* 18, 2 (August 2006): 380-99.

<sup>5</sup> See the contributions to this volume by Sarah Gordon and Albrecht Classen ("Sexual Desire and Pornography"). See also Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte: Geistliche in den Mären des deutschen Mittelalters*. Braunschweiger Beiträge zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 2 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1999).

some scholars have argued,<sup>6</sup> ecclesiastical reformers instead wanted to provide a different model of manhood, one based on celibacy and spiritual authority. The problem with this model, of course, was that it imposed a chaste life upon men who had previously married and procreated. While reformers continued to reiterate the rules of celibacy, many priests from the diocese of Rouen continued to keep their wives, who literally overnight had their marriages invalidated and their status changed from legal spouse to concubines.<sup>7</sup> In Normandy, it was only with the administration of Odo Rigaldus that parish priests with female partners were systematically disciplined for their actions. And it is this record that supplies scholars with information on clerical sexuality.

Clerical sexuality was not eradicated with the advent of celibacy prohibitions. It was instead transformed within the context of medieval masculinity. From the perspective of priests, who had previously engaged in sexual relations with women, the notion of a celibate life would have seemed impossible. Yet, reformers, most of whom were in monastic orders, sought a different way to incorporate chastity in the masculine persona of the clergy. The clerical ideal was envisioned as a life in which the desires of the flesh were constantly being fought. As previous scholars have shown, chastity was a performance in which celibate men continually enacted their masculinity. The constant physical temptations allowed the monk or priest to prove their manhood by denying the pleasures of the flesh. In fact, ecclesiastical reformers preached against physical castration because such a procedure artificially removed sexual desire, thereby making it easier to conquer the libido.<sup>8</sup> Instead, reformers encouraged clerics to fight against their carnal desires. In doing so, they achieved two monumental accomplishments: the maintenance of chastity and the attainment of clerical masculinity.

Clerical masculinity is best demonstrated by monastic sources, which glorified celibacy and bodily asceticism. The ongoing battle against the flesh is a motif frequently found in hagiography and monastic chronicles. In these sources, monks were portrayed as defenders of chastity, but also as warriors who withstood other torments of the body. Carnal temptations were also combined with other physical

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<sup>6</sup> R. N. Swanson, "Angels Incarnate," 160-77.

<sup>7</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 220-21.

<sup>8</sup> John H. Arnold, "The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity," *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 102-18 ; Jacqueline Murray, "Masculinizing Religious Life," *Holiness and Masculinity*, ed. P. H. Cullum and Katharine J. Lewis. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), 24-42; Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity*. The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History and Society (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), chapter eight.

temptations related to the flesh. For instance, the twelfth-century Rupert of Deutz expressed the conflicts that cloistered monastics faced as a battle. As martyrs, Rupert argued, monks endure daily tortures by their seclusion, enforced silence, flagellation, and public chastisement, among other rigors of living. For Rupert, "all these torment the flesh."<sup>9</sup> Even priests were held to the monastic ideal, as in the case of the beatified thirteenth-century Norman priest, Thomas Heliae. In Thomas's vita, the holy man is described as guarding against the desires of the flesh by discipline and fasting.<sup>10</sup> Taken as a whole, monastic writers emphasized the masculine strength of those celibates who disciplined the body through ascetic practices. And, if the connection between battling sexual desires and achieving the clerical ideal was not clear enough, Odo Rigaldus made it quite simple as he preached to an audience of young university students in 1266. He reminded the future clerics to fight "manfully" against the desires of the flesh.<sup>11</sup> Essentially, what these examples indicate is that, from the perspective of the Church, it was not possible to remove sexuality from clerical identity; instead the constant battle against the flesh allowed for the reaffirmation of (clerical) manliness. As much as ecclesiastical reforms imbued the clerical ideal with monastic qualities, evidence indicates, of course, that not all cloistered monks lived up to this ideal.

Like parish priests, it is quite possible that some cloistered monastics experienced difficulty in adopting the clerical model of masculinity. From the transgressions listed for these clerics in Odo Rigaldus's register, it is clear that they were neither isolated nor secluded from their local village communities, but in fact they interacted with men and women outside the cloister. Thus, like many parish priests, some Norman monks were compelled to adopt a gender identity inconsistent with their vocations. This gender identity included breaking vows of celibacy to express their sexuality. In the archbishop's record of visitation, the most numerous offenses committed by Norman monks were not sexual transgressions, but a failure to keep to the Benedictine Rule, especially in matters of fasting and the use of feather beds. For example, the archbishop noted that at the Benedictine priory of St-Pair in August 1250, the monks ate meat and used featherbeds; the same offenses were also found at other monastic communities, including the monks of the monastery at Le Tréport.<sup>12</sup> While the archbishop never explicitly

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 71-72.

<sup>10</sup> Clement, "Vita B. Thomas Heliae," *Acta Sanctorum*, October VIII (1866), 606-18.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques-Guy Bougerol, "Un sermon inédit d'Eudes Rigaud," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 62 (1995): 343-58. The term "manfully" is translated from *viriliter*; another rendering is "in a manly way."

<sup>12</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 87, 139 for an example of this behavior, and *passim*. To date, there has been no quantitative analysis of offenses committed by monks in Odo's register. Penelope D. Johnson has examined the sexual offenses of monks in comparison to the same offenses among nuns in her

draws a connection between fasting and the use of featherbeds to sexual continence, it becomes clear that from the perspective of the Church, there was some relationship between the two. It is significant that in one particular case, at the priory of Montature, Odo noted that two monks in residence had been dining with women in their house and eating meat without restriction. Odo warned them to abstain from both behaviors.<sup>13</sup> Cloistered monks did break their vows of celibacy, and such cases were recorded by the archbishop during his visits. At two visitations of the Benedictine abbey of Saint Catherine, Odo discovered that Brothers Samson and Geoffrey were both rumored of sexual incontinence, as was Bartholomew, the prior of Saint-Aubin and the prior and subprior of Laurent.<sup>14</sup> What is most striking is the number of cases in which a monastic superior, abbot or prior is noted for sexual misbehavior. The prior of Magny was reported by local priests to be involved with two women, one the wife of a knight. These accusations were taken seriously, and the prior was obligated to submit a letter of defamation, in which he promised to resign if these rumors continued. The prior of the hospital at Neufchâtel would leave the dormitory at night to visit a manor house; he was bathed there and visited by an unidentified woman. The abbot of St-Victor-en-Caux was rumored of having a relationship with a local women and then actually had a child with her. He did not attend morning prayers nor did he eat in the refectory with his community.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, these are unique cases, yet they indicate that even those who governed over monastic communities still struggled with their vows of chastity. In the register of Odo Rigaldus, there are other records of sexually incontinent monks, yet overall they are few in comparison to the number of cases among the secular clergy. The cases noted by Odo in his register do suggest that even cloistered monastics did not live in isolation from the men and women in their communities. And, as a result, they still battled real world temptations even as they upheld their own lives as the ideal clerical existence. As Odo's register shows, monks faced sexual temptation in and outside the cloister walls.

What is more certain and more easily documented is that the promotion of clerical manliness conflicted with the actual lives and vocation of the priesthood. The interplay between celibacy and sexuality had different results for the cloistered monastic than it did for the parish priest living in his village. Arguably, the clerical ideal of sexuality was more difficult to follow when placed in a context

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*Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France.* Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 114-15.

<sup>13</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 218.

<sup>14</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 168, 195.

<sup>15</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 40-1, 138-9, 209.



outside of the cloister.<sup>16</sup> The priest's daily life involved interacting with the members of the community, of which many were women. Constant temptation surrounded him as he performed the duties of his vocation, such as administering Mass, hearing confessions, performing marriages and burial rites, and generally tending to the *cura animarum*. Furthermore, he was a spiritual leader in the parish, and the cure of souls literally meant that the priest could not seclude himself away from the world and its temptations.

From the perspective of ecclesiastical reformers, the context in which the manly celibate fought against sexual desires did not matter. If anything, priestly sexuality, due to its performance outside a cloister and the constant temptation of the secular world, was more of a battle than monastic sexuality, and the attainment of clerical manliness potentially greater as a result. Yet on a practical level, the enforcement of chastity upon the secular clergy was a point of conflict from the beginning. The problem with priests violating their vows of celibacy was that they allowed lust to overcome their faculties, and the result could lead to pollution of the sacraments. If they did not fight the desires of the flesh, they failed to achieve clerical manhood and they jeopardized the souls of their parish with their negligence. They were unable to govern themselves, their bodily desires, and this was unsuitable to being a spiritual leader in the community. Yet, there was another dynamic affecting priestly sexuality. As priests lived in village communities, they interacted with men who embodied secular masculine ideals, ideals that relied heavily upon the sexual domination of women. From the perspective of gender, procreation had a dual purpose for most medieval males. It demonstrated virility and it ensured legitimate heirs.

Sexuality, then, for priests living in parishes did not easily fit the ecclesiastical ideals designed for monastics; nor did celibacy, for that matter, easily comply with the standards of lay society. Instead, looking at the case of thirteenth-century Normandy, it becomes clear that priestly sexuality is neither singular nor easily definable. Norman parish priests expressed their sexuality in multiple ways, without formula or prescription. Furthermore, it is evident that a strong minority of these men engaged in active sexual practices, and did not adhere to a chaste life.

Most recently, James Schultz, William Burgwinkle, and Karma Lochrie have all suggested that medieval scholars quit applying notions of heterosexuality to the Middle Ages, seeing this term as anachronistic as homosexuality.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>16</sup> The idea that priests were more often associated with sexual transgressions than monks has also been established by Sara McDougall, "The Prosecution of Sex in Late Medieval Troyes," in the current volume. She argues that priests appeared for illegal sexual relationships 166 times, in comparison to monks, who appeared in her records only 12 times.

<sup>17</sup> See James A. Schultz, "Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, 1 (January 2006): 14-29; Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 199-205, 225;

scholars are misunderstanding clerical sexuality in the same way. Instead of reducing priestly sexuality to an aberrant, illicit behavior, we should be looking at how medieval priests, barred from legitimate sexual unions, created alternative sexualities in the form of concubinage, promiscuity, serial monogamy, and polyconcubinage. The priest could express virility by these unions and potentially achieve a public recognition of manliness for his sexual prowess.

The ways in which priests engaged in sexual activity is well documented in Odo Rigaldus's register. Included in this record is the disciplinary action taken to correct misbehaving clerics. A limitation of this particular source revolves around the issue of intentionality. The register is very one-sided as we rarely hear the perspectives of the priests: how did they feel about their unions with women? Did they prefer random fornication to the more stable concubinage? Because we are not privy to the intentions of these men, we must instead analyze what their sexual activities signify in a clerical and masculine context. Furthermore, it must be disclaimed that accusations of sexual misbehavior were not always legitimate. Yet, using prosopography, the scholar can recreate longer, detailed records of a particular priest's errant behavior over time, records that are not possible with cloistered monastics. What is clear is that Norman parish priests engaged in a variety of sexual behaviors that symbolically demonstrated their manliness. These actions are especially relevant in a milieu where non-clerics fornicated, procreated, and generally dominated women sexually.

Looking at sexual expression from a theoretical perspective illustrates the gendered significance of this behavior. According to the records of Odo's register, the sort of sex that priests most often engaged in was penetrative male/female sex.<sup>18</sup> In her study on knights and sodomy, Ruth Karras has argued that as long as the knight established himself as the "penetrator" that he did not have to restrict himself to heterosexual unions, and could then pursue homoerotic bonds with other men. She says that the knight "had a presumption of masculinity that a cleric did not."<sup>19</sup> While it is certain that knights were presumed to be fully male, clerical gender identity is not as ambiguous as some scholars have insinuated. For

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William Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity and Law in Medieval Literature: France and England, 1050-1230*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85.

<sup>18</sup> This analysis is focused on male/female sexual relations due to the lack of information concerning male-male sexual relations in the Odo's register. There are only three cases of sodomy present in the register, two involving cloistered monks. See Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 4 and 464, for these cases, and Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 331, for an ambiguous case against two parish priests. Undoubtedly more clerics than this engaged in male-male sex, but the evidence from the register is insufficient for a detailed analysis.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth M. Karras, "Knighthood, Compulsory Heterosexuality and Sodomy," *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, ed. Mathew Kuefler (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 273-83.

instance, it is not clear that medieval communities viewed their clerics as non-male, or that they viewed clerical gender as problematic. These are large assumptions on our part. Yet, Karras's analysis is useful in thinking about clerical, especially priestly, sexuality. As long as priests established themselves as "penetrators" and, for that matter, as sexual dominators of women, they did not have to restrict themselves to monogamous unions, but instead could demonstrate virility in a number of ways. While this behavior was illicit and punished by ecclesiastical authorities if discovered, acting as the "penetrator" still brought gains to the priest in terms of gender perception.

Beginning in the late eleventh century, the reforming Church took measures to prohibit subdeacons, deacons, and priests from cohabitating with women; Lateran II in 1139 specifically made marriage an impediment to entrance into Holy Orders.<sup>20</sup> With clerical marriage invalidated and the children of these unions pronounced illegitimate, men in holy orders may not have felt compelled to duplicated the lay model of marriage, although there is evidence that this occurred. With prohibitions against priestly marriage and sex, those taken to the celibate life enacted masculine dominance in a variety of sexual ways, in the form of general fornication, adultery, concubinage, and polyconcubinage. In many ways, being barred from legitimate marital unions and the procreation of legitimate heirs might have led priests to employ their sexuality in a myriad of ways.

Priests did establish households of their own, with female partners. Of course, such unions were deemed illicit and invalid under canon law. A concubinous priest might have been less a threat to other male householders in the community, because he had established his own quasi-marital household; it is possible that rather than seeing such behavior as ungodly, male householders felt their wives and daughters were secure from the sexual advances of priests. There were also benefits for the cleric. By establishing a household on the lay model, he was achieving, at best, an equivalent model of virility to that of secular men. Richard, priest of Rouxmesnil, "held for a long time" a woman by whom he had a child. Odo ordered the priest to be disciplined by the archdeacon, and the gossip momentarily ceased.<sup>21</sup> Another priest from the village of Brachy was having trouble with his partner. His concubine refused to return to his house, so he had his food and grain brought to her house, and consequently, he could eat with her there.<sup>22</sup> While these unions were not considered legitimate by the Church, parishioners may have perceived them as valid in the sense of conferring householder status and manliness upon the curate. It is notable that some Norman

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<sup>20</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, 220-21.

<sup>21</sup> Bonnín, *Regestrum*, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Bonnín, *Regestrum*, 29.

priests recorded in the register carried on sexual relationships simultaneously with two or more women. I dub this behavior “polyconcubinage,” and there are more than two cases of such behavior recorded. The priest from Sauchy-au-Bosc fell under scrutiny for his “incontinence” with a woman from the village of Berengreville and another from Coqueraumont.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the priest of Saint Mary de Sauchy was ordered to cease his association with a woman from Dieppe and another who was a candlemaker.<sup>24</sup>

Yet a priest who engaged in sexual competition, by way of adultery and multiple sexual unions, established his virility as a more potent form than that established by other men in the village. General fornication and promiscuity allowed priests to establish their sexual identities as the active penetrator. The nature of manliness dictates that it must be publicly demonstrated; thus a virile sexual identity must reach public knowledge in some form.

Most recently, gossip has been seen as a vehicle, largely one of women, to convey knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Priestly sexual behavior could be established in front of a community in many ways, often using the vehicle of gossip. Suspicion of the priest entering the home of his female parishioner, the female servant who frequents the rectory in order to clean it, the niece living with her uncle who is the village priest—there were many ways in which clerical sexuality was recognized by the community through the forum of gossip. In her latest work, Shannon McSheffrey recounts the case of a man who slept with a prostitute in order to prove he could; he did so out of fear that women in the parish would think him impotent and ruin his courtship of another woman.<sup>26</sup> Undoubtedly, this fellow knew that the prostitute would gossip and in some way news of his potency would reach the female community, who would receive it as truth and disseminate it.

The case of Walter, priest of Bray-sous-Baudemont, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, illustrates how rumor could serve to confirm priestly virility. Walter was cited for concubinage, which he claimed had ended; yet he was also accused of fornication, especially with prostitutes. In fact, the description from Walter’s testimony suggests that he was well known among the prostitutes in his parish, as were other priests from the neighboring communities. Thus, gossip functioned in much the same way as it provided knowledge of the sexual potency of these clerics. The sexual identities of these men were well established through the channels of gossip, which was a forum dominated by women.

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<sup>23</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 328-9.

<sup>25</sup> Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations*, chapter two; Sandy Bardsley, *Venomous Tongues: Speech and Gender in Late Medieval England*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), chapters one and two.

<sup>26</sup> Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 184.

Yet some have questioned how celibacy breaches could affirm masculine sexuality, and by extension, masculinity. Derek Neal has argued that because the vow of celibacy was a primary feature of clerical identity, breaking such a vow led to a denial of the cleric's social identity and brought dishonor upon him.<sup>27</sup> To what extent was sexual scandal beneficial to the priest? By his frequent fornication and procreation of children, Walter demonstrated publicly his sexual potency. Dishonor, I would argue, only became a factor when the priest was severely disciplined by his superiors. In this case, Walter was deprived of his benefice, hence his livelihood, due to his numerous infractions. A man deprived of his livelihood was publicly dishonored. Until his removal from office, public knowledge of his frequent fornication did not bring dishonor; instead, it brought the opposite results: a public affirmation of his masculinity. It seems that as much as the reforming Church tried to distinguish the clergy from the laity, in part by elevating their status and delineating their conduct from others, clerics sometimes chose to align themselves with the standards of secular manliness.

Adulterous unions had the potential to increase the stakes for masculine status, due to the very nature of such unions. Sexually conquering another man's wife signified a superior sexuality, and by extension, a superior masculinity. Popular literature from the time period suggests that some men feared the sexuality of a priest for this very reason. In the fabliau "Aloul," the title character awakes one night to find the local priest making love to his wife as he lay beside them.<sup>28</sup> In another story, "The Fisherman from Pont-sur-Seine," a priest was found floating dead in the Seine with an erect phallus, having been chased to his death by a knight who caught him having sex with his wife.<sup>29</sup> While these stories are fiction, they nonetheless reflect a concern on the part of non-clerics with the sexuality of priests. The adulterer's masculine status was achieved by suspicion and action. It had the potential to create fear in the males of the community, because it cast suspicion on their own women. Are their wives being seduced? If so, and the priest is the culprit, then the cleric has established sexual hegemony over the secular male. The seemingly celibate cleric, a prisoner of his own natural desires, has become a superior male to the non-celibates in his community.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Derek Neal, "Meanings of Masculinity in Late Medieval England," Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 2004, 214-15.

<sup>28</sup> *Fabliaux, Fair and Foul*, trans. John Duval, introd. and notes by Raymond Eichmann (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 117; this fabliau has been discussed from many different perspectives, which confirms its high literary quality. See *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2007), 7-8. 10-16.

<sup>29</sup> Duval, *Fabliaux, Fair and Foul*, 56-7.

<sup>30</sup> See also Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte*, 123-31.

Sexually conquering another man's wife was a supreme achievement. Derek Neal has suggested that adultery was not a significantly different form of conquest for the male. Women, be they wives or daughters, belonged to another man. Thus, any form of sexual tryst with these women formed an assault against the honor of another householder.<sup>31</sup> While I would agree that such trysts did equate an assault against the masculinity of the householder, I would argue that not all of these unions would have been seen in the same way. The wife, seduced by the priest, was the ultimate object of assault, while seducing virgin daughters was most likely a lesser form of dishonor, one that could be remedied by a quick betrothal and illicit marriage to another man. But because the wife was the sexual province of her husband, a sexual union with her signified a greater conquest for the priest and a great assault against the honor of the husband and householder. Such affairs maintained their significance whether or not they became public knowledge, for the suspicion alone suggested male virility.

Robert de Bosc found Henry, the priest at Ecretteville, hiding in his garden one evening; a fight broke out between them, no doubt due to the rumor that Henry was sleeping with Robert's wife.<sup>32</sup> In this case, it was Robert's duty to assault the priest, due to the public perception that he was being cuckolded by the local priest. Odo first summoned Thomas Houffroi, a cleric from the village of Villemerville, to appear before him in January 1260 to post a bond of twenty pounds on his oath that he would cease his relations with Valentina, the wife of William Trenchant. Two years later, Thomas was again accused of an affair with Valentina; he refused to confess to the charge. On the day assigned for his canonical purgation, the archdeacon, fearing Thomas's response to the inevitable outcome of the investigation, ordered him to leave town for two years for university study. By June 1265, Thomas was clearly back in his parish. In that year, Odo's register recorded that the cleric appeared before the archdeacon for canonical purgation, because he had "relapsed" with Valentina; eventually, his purgation was put aside in favor of the priest once again leaving the village for a year. If he returned before then, he would be fined ten pounds.<sup>33</sup> The penalty for adultery ranged; clearly not all rumors were taken seriously. Some priests accused of adulterous unions were fined and some ordered to undergo canonical purgation. In some cases where such affairs had created a scandal, such as in the case of Thomas and Valentina, the cleric was ordered to exchange his church benefice with one in another parish or

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<sup>31</sup> Derek Neal, "Meanings of Masculinity," 172.

<sup>32</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 385, 425, 432, 520 and 523. Although the parish of "Willemervilla" is not listed in the register as belonging to a particular archdeaconry, it is likely that it is the parish of Vinemerville, in the archdeaconate of Major Caux. If value of this parish was listed as thirty pounds in the census, thus making the initial penalty of twenty pounds quite punitive.

even diocese.<sup>34</sup> This was seen as an effective measure to prevent future affairs, and to prevent the fallout from such liaisons. Clearly, Odo realized that it would not serve the parish to allow an adulterous priest to coexist in a community with the cuckolded husband. In no cases were priests ever ordered to exchange a church as a penalty for deflowering a man's daughter. However, priests who seduced young daughters still faced serious penalties. Stephan, the priest at Denestanville, paid a fine of twenty *livres* because of his misdeeds with the daughter of Robert Pesant of Longueville. Since Stephan's parish church brought in a revenue of fifty *livres* annually, this shows that the archbishop took this offense very seriously.<sup>35</sup> Yet he did not order Stephan to exchange his church with one in another parish or diocese. While the sexual conquest of a man's daughter likely was viewed as a source of dishonor, it was nonetheless a lesser dishonor than an affair with his wife.

Another aspect of priestly sexuality that was documented in Odo's register was the sexual relationships that some clerics pursued with vowed celibate women. Sex with celibate women could be interpreted in many ways. With the priest as the active, the seducer who has infiltrated the female monastic community and deflowered the "virgins," the symbolism becomes clear. Sex with celibate women could increase the appearance of masculinity and virility, for these women were not easily accessible to other men. This does not mean that religious women did not seek such sexual unions. Clearly, some nuns did consent to sexual relationships, although, as Penelope Johnson has argued, these women were no more likely to break their vows than male monastics.<sup>36</sup> There are well documented cases of nuns involved with men and the overwhelming majority of cases involved secular clerics. Odo ordered Thomas, the priest at Forges-les-Eaux, to stay away from the women's community at Saint Aubin; reportedly, he had been frequenting this house and as a result had caused a scandal.<sup>37</sup> Similar activity was reported at the nunnery of Villarceaux. The cellaress of the convent was rumored to be involved with a priest from the nearby village. Sisters Phillipa of Rouen and Agnes of Fontenay were involved with different priests from the diocese of Chartres. Sister Jacqueline left the convent because she was pregnant with the child of the chaplain; Agnes of Mont Secours was rumored to be involved with the same chaplain.<sup>38</sup> At the women's priory of Saint-Saens, Odo ordered the priest there to

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<sup>34</sup> There are numerous examples of priests ordered to exchange churches for adultery. See Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 532, for the case of Oliver, rector of Toqueville, and Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 425, for the case of Luke, priest of Saint Nicholas de Rouen.

<sup>35</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 614 and 621; "Polyptychum Rotomagensis ecclesiae," *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* 23 (Paris: Palmé, 1874), 299.

<sup>36</sup> Penelope Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 112-30.

<sup>37</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 587.

<sup>38</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 43.

be removed for his sexual misbehavior. On another visit, Odo reported that Simon, the village priest of Saint Saens, was known to have fathered many children with one of the nuns.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly enough, the proportion of priests carrying on sexual relationships with nuns appears higher than that of cloistered monks.

Rather than view the sexual behavior of clerics as a morality issue or a reform issue, we should be viewing it as an expression of gender identity. Understanding male celibates in their particular vocational context is crucial; this paper has argued that parish priests and some monks expressed their sexuality in a way completely at odds with the ideal of clerical masculinity. These men transgressed their vows in order to express their sexuality in a way consistent with the secular ideal of manhood. Even for those clerics who abided by their vows of chastity, sexuality could never be completely removed from their behavior, for it provided an ongoing battle that allowed them to prove their (clerical) masculinity over and over again. While undoubtedly many clerics pursued sexual relationships out of biological needs, the ways in which they pursued women reveal their conception of masculinity and thus clerical sexuality is useful for understanding the masculine gender identity of these men.

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<sup>39</sup> Bonnin, *Regestrum*, 140, 187, 338 and 491.





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## Feminine Sexuality in the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle

In the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle sex can be a destructive force for both men and women.<sup>1</sup> Bound up with the doctrine of original sin, sexual desire is a curse firmly embedded in human nature that carries over from one generation to the next. Sex gone awry often manifests itself as a character flaw, which can have dire consequences for the lustful and their offspring. Kathleen M. Llewellyn in her article on sex and death in the present collection of essays states: "It is inevitable, then, that sex and death would meet, and although Freud construed them as opposing passions, we find that sex is inextricably linked with death in medieval and early modern literature."<sup>2</sup> In a former article I demonstrated how illicit couplings can have negative ramifications on the children born of such unions and how sexual flaws intensify from father to son in both King Arthur's and Lancelot's lineages.<sup>3</sup> Although women played a subordinate role in the Middle Ages and were therefore required to be virgins in maidenhood and faithful wives in marriage, their sexuality could not be entirely suppressed. It cropped up in myriad, often sublimated ways that belied men's attempts to dominate them. There are many lustful women in the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle who, like men, cannot

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<sup>1</sup> All references to the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle refer to Alexandre Micha's edition: *Lancelot: Roman en prose du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. 9 vols. (Geneva and Paris: Droz, 1978–1983). English translations are from *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation*, general ed. Norris J. Lacy. 5 vols. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 1964 (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1992–1996). For both works I will refer to volume number and page.

<sup>2</sup> Karen M. Llewellyn, "Deadly Sex and Sexy Death in Early Modern French Literature," in this volume (805).

<sup>3</sup> "Genealogy and Adventure in the Cyclic Prose *Lancelot*," *Conjunctures: Medieval Studies in Honor of Douglas Kelly*, ed. Keith Busby and Norris J. Lacy. Faux Titre, 83 (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994), 139–51. See also, Emmanuèle Bumgartner, "From Lancelot to Galahad: The Stakes of Filiation," *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle: Text and Transformations*, ed. William W. Kibler (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), 14–30.

suppress their natural instincts. Nonetheless, when we attempt to define female sexuality, we must keep in mind the double standard of that time that on the one hand required women to be pure in order to ensure the legitimacy of the family line and yet at the same time, through highly esteemed authorities such as Aristotle, Jerome, Ambrose, and Gratian, they were relegated to the sphere of the lustful because of their reputedly inherent physical and moral weaknesses.<sup>4</sup> Because women's roles were defined in such conventional and often contradictory terms with regard to sex, that is, within the extremes of the virgin and whore, with no middle ground, the task of defining feminine sexuality becomes very complicated as women are forced to mask their true desires behind the cloak of social respectability or the male model that has been projected onto them.

In addition to the huge gap that separates the modern reader from the medieval mind-set, our understanding of medieval female sexuality is complicated by the conflicting social messages that both affirm and deny their sexuality. Accordingly, I would like to pose the following questions: is the sexuality manifested in medieval texts a true reflection of female behavior, or a stereotype perpetrated by the male scribes and clerics who composed these texts and could possibly be titillated or flattered by the images of feminine sexuality they have depicted, hence tried to fend off the seductiveness of women by denigrating them as nymphomantic?<sup>5</sup> And further, to what extent did the noblewomen, for whom these texts were most probably composed, influence the depiction of female sexuality?<sup>6</sup> Are these depictions accurate or pure male fantasy and projections? We shall perhaps never have an adequate response to these questions, yet they do bear keeping in mind lest we make sweeping assumptions that do not accurately reflect social reality.

My objective in this essay will be to examine various manifestations of feminine sexuality in the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle in order to arrive at a coherent pattern that may give us a better understanding of how feminine sexuality operates in this very important and complex thirteenth century French romance, which outlines,

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of these conflicting views, see Joyce E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York and London: Garland, 1996), 81–122 and Albrecht Classen's introduction to this volume.

<sup>5</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Jean E. Jost.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between the female reader and medieval literature, see Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*. Cambridge Studies in French, 43 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997). Now see also Albrecht Classen, *The Power of a Woman's Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literature: New Approaches to German and European Women Writers and to Violence Against Women in Premodern Times*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007).

through its twists of plot, an art of both human and divine love.<sup>7</sup> The numerous female characters who populate the *Lancelot-Grail* and their diverse love affairs that are developed throughout the course of the romance make this text particularly apt for a discussion of female sexuality. Attitudes toward sexuality also change as the cycle progresses.

I have argued elsewhere that in the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle male characters are organized in a hierarchy with those of lesser merit attempting adventures that end in failure in order to enhance the reputation of the knight or knights who surpass them.<sup>8</sup> By observing the struggles and failures of the minor knights who are the first to attempt difficult adventures, we come to appreciate better the merits of their successors who bring the adventures to completion. Major knights serve as types or exemplars of a particular world-view that succeeds or fails depending on how the knight fares in his adventures. A worthy knight can excel only if he has worthy opponents, and his triumph over his adversaries proves the superiority of his world-view and actions. At the beginning of the romance, the portion commonly referred to as the *Prose Lancelot*, Gauvain, as the exemplar of Arthur's lineage, is the greatest of knights who, through his courtesy, exemplifies the epitome of courtliness.

However, Lancelot, who represents in his separate, superior lineage the merits of *fin'amor*, which impels a knight to accomplish more than what can be attained by courtesy alone, gradually surpasses Gauvain as the cycle progresses. Lancelot in turn is outdone by Galaad, Perceval, and Bohort, who demonstrate in the *Queste del Saint Graal* that love of God leads to greater honor than love born of adulterous *fin'amor*. This evolution, where human love in its sexual and spiritual manifestations is transcended by love of God, reflects a phenomenon that Molly Robinson Kelly comments on in relation to Marie de France's *lais*, in particular, *Eliduc*, which she describes as representing "one final, highly spiritual, manifestation of the multivalent sexuality at work throughout Marie de France's masterpiece."<sup>9</sup> In this *lai*, as Kelly describes it, the tension created by the love

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<sup>7</sup> The anonymous *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle (often called the Vulgate Cycle), written between 1215 and 1235, is commonly subdivided into five parts, each with its own style in the following order, the *Lancelot Proper*, *Queste del Saint Graal*, *La Mort Artu*, *Estoire de Merlin* and *Estoire del Saint Graal*. My paper deals chiefly with the *Lancelot Proper*, or *Prose Lancelot*.

<sup>8</sup> Stacey L. Hahn, "Patterned Diversity: Hierarchy and Love in the *Prose Lancelot*," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1988; see *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 49A (1988-1989): 1796; eadem, "Camelot Through the Eyes of Arthur's Nephews: Seeds of Dissension in the Cyclic *Prose Lancelot*," *The Arthurian Yearbook III*, ed. Keith Busby. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 1813 (New York and London: Garland, 1993), 21-38.

<sup>9</sup> Molly Robinson Kelly, "Sex and Fertility in Marie de France's *Lais*," in this volume, 254. Even closer to my own argument, Christopher R. Clason reaches very comparable insights regarding Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* in his contribution to this volume.

triangle “disappears as all three elements are subsumed into harmonious unity with God.”<sup>10</sup>

Whereas before, in previous *lais*, the adulterous love triangle ends tragically for the married spouse who is abandoned by his or her adulterous partner, whether rightly or wrongly, as in *Bisclavret*, *Yonec*, and *Equitan*, *Eliduc* allows for the ultimate harmony of all parties involved in the love triangle through the sublimation of passionate, human love based on the exclusivity of the couple in favor of the selflessness that can only be attained through the transcendent love of God.<sup>11</sup> The *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle delivers in one work the same message regarding love that we glean in the diverse and separate *lais* of Marie de France. In both works we observe the portrait of multivalent sexuality whose twists and turns reap greater or lesser rewards according to the manner in which sexuality manifests itself, whether it be in a positive manner through the production of offspring, a mutually gratifying love that transcends all obstacles, or through chastity in the name of religion or negatively, in the destruction generated by illicit couplings that lead to betrayal, mayhem or murder.

A similar hierarchy or gradation in merit that we observed among the male characters in the *Lancelot-Grail* holds true for women. Female characters fall into several types whose roles contrast with that of the main heroine Guinevere, who at the beginning of the romance typifies the highest ideal to which a woman can attain in both lineage, as she is the wife of the most noble of kings, and in moral attributes and beauty. Women of lesser rank who behave badly or love poorly enhance Guinevere's role as queen and affirm her worthiness to be the wife of King Arthur and mistress of the world's best knight, Lancelot.

Guinevere enhances her worth when she interacts with others in a positive way as when she makes peace with the Lady of Malohaut, enjoins Groadain's niece to love Hector in a more dignified, less possessive manner, obtains the goodwill of the Lady of the Lake, maintains her dignity in the face of turmoil, has faith in her knight's prowess unlike the Lady of Roestoc or Heliene sanz Per and helps to smooth over potential conflicts that arise at court. But, as with the male characters, when the adventures of the Grail approach, Guinevere, like her male counterpart Lancelot, is relegated to a subordinate position as Perceval's sister, who embodies the superior ethic of devotion to God through virginity and self-sacrifice, gradually prevails as a model. Most examples of female sexuality occur in the

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<sup>10</sup> Robinson Kelly, “Sex and Fertility,” 254 (in this volume).

<sup>11</sup> This finds intriguing parallels in late-medieval women's mystical discourse, such as by Hadewijch, Mechthild von Magdeburg, or Brigit of Sweden. See Albrecht Classen, “Worldly Love - Spiritual Love. The Dialectics of Courtly Love in the Middle Ages,” *Studies in Spirituality* 11 (2001): 166–86; id., “Die flämische Mystikerin Hadewijch als erotische Liebesdichterin,” *Studies in Spirituality* 12 (2002): 23–42.

*Prose Lancelot* portion of the cycle where the theme of love service is slowly developed and still maintains its legitimacy as a social ideal. It is here where women express most freely their sexual desires without incurring social or divine retribution, provided their behavior falls within the confines of the courtly norm.<sup>12</sup>

As a general rule feminine desire gravitates toward the dominant, highest-ranking males, such as King Arthur, Lancelot, and Gauvain. Annie Combes has distinguished the unfolding of three separate narrative patterns in the *Lancelot-Grail*, namely, the heroic, the Breton, and Tarmelidien.<sup>13</sup> She perceives Arthur and Lancelot as representing two individuated types stemming from separate traditions. According to Combes, Lancelot embodies the Breton hero by virtue of his association with Celtic supernatural themes linked to specific places such as the Lake, Logres, and Corbenic (101), while King Arthur embodies the epic or feudal hero whose adventures center around combat with other kings for the sake of military supremacy.

A large portion of the early romance focuses on themes that develop first in relation to King Arthur and his duty to maintain the military preeminence of his regime and later in relation to Lancelot and the ideals of *fin'amor* as the cycle progresses. The conflict between these two heroic models fits the general narrative pattern of the romance where one older ideal is phased out as a more contemporary one takes precedence. This pattern reflects a similar trajectory that developed with respect to the twelfth-century tale of *Tristan and Yseut*, a romance that shaped both Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot* and the *Prose Lancelot*. This romance, which exists in two versions, that of Béroul and Thomas, reflects two evolving, contradictory views of love.

Béroul's older, more primitive rendition is termed feudal or epic because it focuses on the way the adulterous love affair between Tristan and Yseut undermines King Marc's authority as king to uphold the standards of morality. Even though the love triangle threatens the social order by incurring the wrath of Marc's barons who insist that Marc punish the lovers, Tristan and Yseut always triumph over their adversaries because fate always works in their favor. Thomas's later, more pessimistic reformulation of the romance emphasizes the psychology of love and its effect on the individual as opposed to the feudal themes of vengeance and sovereignty.

In Thomas's world the lovers cannot overcome the social obstacles that stand in their way, which leads to inner despair and finally death so that their world

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed examination of the love theme with or without reference to the Grail, see Elspeth Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1986), 49–79 and 253–313.

<sup>13</sup> Annie Combes, *Les Voies de l'aventure: réécriture et composition romanesque dans le 'Lancelot' en prose*. Nouvelle bibliothèque du Moyen Age, 59 (Paris: Champion, 2001), 101–03.

crumbles from within when fate abandons them to their own devices. According to the pattern described above, where the feudal theme dominates the first portion of the romance gradually to be replaced by the theme of the Breton hero, feminine desire focuses first on King Arthur in keeping with the epic tradition and his status as king, and then on Lancelot, with women of lesser status falling in love with lower ranking knights. The False Guinevere and Gamille the Enchantress attempt to seduce Arthur by alienating him from his legitimate spouse, Guinevere, so as to usurp her position as royal consort and thus gain power and influence over him. These women, who use sex to gain access to the king, do not act alone. In the background lurks a man plotting to unseat Arthur by making him vulnerable through sexual dalliance. The False Guinevere and Gamille seem more interested in ameliorating their social status or influencing the king through their role as wife than they are in pursuing love as a test of spiritual mettle.<sup>14</sup> The movement from an older, feudal order where women seek to seduce men in order to marry and through marriage gain power, to an order based on adultery and the freedom to choose one's lover, where sex is freely enjoyed, rather than directed toward marriage or the production of children, marks an important step toward female sexual autonomy. In fact, Guinevere's ability to enjoy her sexuality lies in the freedom her high social status brings her and in her freedom from childbearing, which would otherwise take up all her time, and threaten more intensely the integrity of the realm were she to bear illegitimate offspring. For many women the fear of pregnancy hampers sexual enjoyment.

Separate from, yet connected to the theme of sexuality and the two heroic models, are the Lady of the Lake, who plays a significant role, not as a lover herself, but rather as a facilitator of love, and Arthur's half-sister Morgain, who at the opposite extreme, exhibits inordinate lust and whose jealousy is partly to blame for the revelation of Guinevere's infidelity to Arthur that leads to the downfall of the Arthurian realm. The scribes of the *Prose Lancelot* make every attempt to demonstrate the integrity and dignity of the Lady of the Lake (or Niniene as she is sometimes called) and insist that her love for Lancelot is purely disinterested and maternal.<sup>15</sup> Terms to describe this love are "amor de nourriture"

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<sup>14</sup> Combes, *Les Voies de l'aventure*, 103–05, identifies the episodes dealing with Gamille and the False Guinevere as Tarmelidian, an anomaly that distinguishes these episodes from the rest of the cycle (103–05). I tend to see them as fitting into the heroic or feudal model.

<sup>15</sup> The status of the Lady of the Lake's sexuality evolves: Early on her virginity is emphasized in order to make it clear that her protection of Lancelot is altruistic and maternal: the Lake is associated with the virgin goddess Diana, the Lady of the Lake learns her magic from Merlin without sacrificing her virginity; however, at the moment when the Lady of the Lake discusses the subject of love with Guinevere after having sent the Spilt Shield, she mentions her *ami* and that in order to allay suspicions, she told this boyfriend that Lancelot was her nephew. Perhaps this is meant to reassure Guinevere that the Lady of the Lake has no sexual interest in Lancelot.

and “amor de pitie.” If the Lady of the Lake sanctions the adulterous love between Lancelot and Guinevere, it is because she has the best interests of Lancelot in mind since he can only attain great glory by loving the most noble of women and through love the ability to achieve great deeds. As part of his education the Lady of the Lake instructs Lancelot to love wisely so that he will continually strive to improve himself:

Quele fu la chose, fait il, que ma dame m’oblia a mander? –Che fu, fait ele, que vous ne metés vo cuer en amor qui vous fache aparechier, mais amender, car cuers qui por amors devient perecheus ne puet a haute chose ataindre, car il n’ose; mais cil qui tous jors bee a amender puet ataindre a toutes hautes chose autresi com il l’ose emprendre (Vol. 7 349–50).

[“What was the message,” he asked, “that my Lady had forgotten to send me?” “It was,” she said, “that you should give your heart to a love that will turn you not into an idle knight but a finer one, for a heart that becomes idle through love loses its daring and therefore cannot attain high things. But he who always strives to better himself and dares to be challenged can attain all high things (Vol. 2, 84).”]

In contrast to Niniane, according to Maureen Fries, the character of Morgain has degenerated from being that of a beautiful, healing figure, similar in virtue to the Lady of the Lake in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini* and Chrétien’s *Erec*, to that of a lecherous, unattractive and vengeful creature in later works like the *Prose Lancelot*.<sup>16</sup> Fries believes this devaluation of Morgain parallels the more critical, cynical view of women that emerges in the thirteenth century and which marks a departure from an older, more positive view of the supernatural powers of women. Within the context of the *Lancelot-Grail* Morgan serves as a foil to the Lady of the Lake, revealing the dark side of love that can easily slip from selflessness to self-indulgence, insecurity, rage, and jealousy. Carolyne Larrington in her detailed study of the enchantresses Morgain and the Lady of the Lake distinguishes several disparities between them: the Lady of the Lake uses magic to heal and protect Lancelot while Morgain uses magic to further her plots and subdue him, and Morgain’s confinement of men is “usually erotically motivated” while the Lady of the Lake provides a safe, maternal space where Lancelot and his cousins Bohort and Lionel can take refuge until they are old enough to fend for themselves.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Maureen Fries, “Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter-Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Literature,” *Arthurian Women*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 59–95; here 69. See also Albrecht Classen, “Frauen in den Volksbüchern des 15. Jahrhunderts. Beispiele für einen sozialhistorischen Paradigmawechsel,” *Text im Kontext: Anleitung zur Lektüre deutscher Texte der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Alexander Schwarz and Laure Abplanalp. Tausch, 9 (Bern, Frankfurt a. M., et al.: Peter Lang, 1997), 49–68, who has observed the same progression regarding late-medieval German women characters whose personalities evolve from courtly lady to witch.

<sup>17</sup> Carolyne Larrington, *King Arthur’s Enchantresses: Morgain and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 19–23.



Guinevere's marriage to King Arthur is highly conventional and harmonious, based on moderation, friendship, reason, and mutual respect. The very equanimity of their relationship, lacking any real passion or quarrels, belies a certain disinterest on the part of Guinevere, who was chosen by King Arthur to be his wife, yet whose feelings for Arthur prior to the marriage are not revealed. Guinevere's sexual awakening literally begins with the arrival at court of young Lancelot whose virginity and inexperience in chivalry are symbolized by the white clothing the Lady of the Lake prepares for him to wear. Guinevere, as an older, experienced married woman, detects that Lancelot is in love with her by observing in him the outward signs of lovesickness.

Guinevere makes the first moves during their first meeting by interrogating Lancelot and touching his hand. She notices his extreme temerity in speaking with her and the perilous feats he undertakes shortly upon his arrival, which could only be inspired by love. Guinevere carefully observes Lancelot's behavior through the course of several long and arduous adventures to make sure that he loves her and only then does she grant him her favors. Guinevere's behavior within the confines of *fin'amor* is always correct: she proceeds slowly, she loves Lancelot faithfully, and it is Galehaut, and not herself, who arranges the first tryst. Lancelot's inexperience in love creates an impasse since his fear and respect for Guinevere make it impossible for him to express his love to her openly or to make any physical advances. The only way he can comfortably express his feelings is through his great feats of valor.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, when Guinevere is certain that Lancelot's love is sincere, she has no qualms about moving forward. During the first tryst, when finding a moment to be alone with Lancelot in order to kiss him becomes difficult due to the presence of others, Guinevere tells Galehaut she will take the risk as long as Lancelot is willing:

Del baisier, fait ele, n'est il mie ore liex ne tans. Et n'en doutés mie, que j'en sui ausi volentieve com il est, mais ches dames sont iluec qui moult se merveillent que nous avons tant fait: si ne porroit estre que eles ne le veissent. Et neporquant, s'il volt, je le baiseraï moult volentiers (Vol. 8, p. 115).

["This is neither the time nor place for kissing," she said. "Have no fear, I'm as eager for it as he is, but those ladies there are already wondering that we have done so much, and they would necessarily see it. And yet, if he wishes, I will most willingly give him a kiss (Vol. 2, 146)].

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<sup>18</sup> For the similar situation in Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomedon*, see the contribution to this volume by Suzanne Kocher.

And a bit later, she adds: "De coi me feroie ore proier? fait ele. Plus le veul que vous ne li" (Vol. 8, 115; "Why should I need to be urged? She asked. "I wish it more than you or he;" Vol. 2, 146).

When it comes time for the actual kissing, Guinevere engages in a bit of force and exhibitionism:

Et la roine voit que li chevaliers n'en ose plus faire, si le prent par le menton et le baise devant Galahot assés longuement si que la dame de Malohaut seit qu'ele le baise (Vol. 8, 115–16).

[Seeing that the knight dared no more, the queen took him by the chin and gave him a prolonged kiss in front of Galehaut, so that the lady of Malehaut knew that she was kissing him (Vol. 2, 146).

This blatant display of sexuality before a male and female witness makes it clear to both Galehaut and the Lady of Malohaut, Guinevere's potential rival, that she loves Lancelot and claims him as her own.

Just as Galehaut made the fateful first kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere possible, it is the Lady of the Lake who initiates, sanctions, and approves their physical lovemaking by sending Guinevere the magical Split Shield, an emblem of their love, that can only be made whole when Lancelot and Guinevere consummate their love. This gentle push from outside gives the lovers the impetus to accomplish what their hearts desire. The Split Shield depicts a knight and a lady embracing whose lips are separated by a small gap running the length of the shield that widens at the bottom.<sup>19</sup> The melding of the shield after lovemaking implies that the love between Lancelot and Guinevere is a complete whole, comprised of both spiritual and physical elements.

The Lady of the Lake is the tutelary spirit and guardian of *fin'amor* and therefore her attitude toward Guinevere is one of affection and love since both women desire Lancelot's happiness and fulfillment.<sup>20</sup> By embracing and approving female sexuality as an integral part of love, without feeling threatened by it, the Lady of the Lake embraces all of feminine experience. The Lady of the Lake resists male hegemony by reinforcing the bonds between women and by refusing to deny women the wholeness of sexual experience as an integral part of love. She does

<sup>19</sup> This might be an image deeply imbued with sexual innuendo, possibly referring to the female genitals. For a discussion of innuendos, see the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph.

<sup>20</sup> Anne Berthelot, "From the Lake to the Fountain: Lancelot and the Fairy Lover," *Arthurian Women*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 153–69; here 167, detects a certain rivalry between Guinevere and the Lady of the Lake: "A certain hostility nonetheless subsists between the two ladies, representatives of incompatible principles." She also views the Split Shield as somewhat subversive: "In this double-edged gift can be found the echo of a threat and the fairy's insistence upon underlining her part in the development of the romance" (ibid.).

this while maintaining her autonomy, choosing to live within the magic walls of the lake, wholly independent of male rule.

Indeed, her relationships with men are rather obscure in that she is first described as a virgin, then as having a chaste friendship with Merlin from whom she gained her skills in necromancy, and finally, as having an "ami," perhaps in accord with the loss of female autonomy that occurs as the romance progresses.

The Lady of the Lake harkens back to a more primitive female ethic based on autonomy and the unrestrained sexuality of natural forces. In some respects the Lady of the Lake resembles Venus in Jean de Meun's portion of the *Romance of the Rose*. Without Venus, who represents female sexual desire, the taking of the rose on the part of the lover would be a rape; hence, any depiction of mutual love must contain an element of female desire.

Returning to the feudal theme, the very night that Lancelot and Guinevere make love for the first time, King Arthur sleeps with the Saxon enchantress, Gamille. This encounter occurs during a battle over military supremacy between Arthur and the Saxons. Gamille brazenly challenges Arthur to come sleep with her:

"Sire, vous estes li plus preudom qui vive et vous me faites entendant que vous m'amés sor toutes femes; et jel voeil esprover, se vous l'osés faire, d'une chose." — "Il n'est," fait il, nule chose que je ne fesisse por vous." — "Je voeil, fait ele, que vous venés anuit jesir o moi en chele tor." — "Ce n'est mie, fait il, essoines, se vous me creantés que je ferai de vous ce que chevaliers doit faire de s'amie." Et ele li creante et il dist qu'il i venra, si tost com il avra ses chevaliers veus et mengié avoec els (Vol. 8, 441).

["My lord, you are the worthiest man alive, and you give me to understand that you love me above all women. I wish to test this, if you dare do one thing for me." "There is nothing I wouldn't do for you." "I want you to come lie with me tonight in this tower." "There is no obstacle," he replied, "if you promise I may do with you what a knight should do to his ladylove." She promised him this, and he said he would come just as soon as he had seen his knights and dined with them (Vol. 2, 227)."]

After Arthur sleeps with the maiden, he and his companion Guerrehet are easily made prisoners in their unarmed state. We learn that Gamille did not really love Arthur at all but merely used sex as a means of entrapping him for the sake of her brother, Hargadabranz, who aspires to conquer Britain by making Arthur his prisoner. When Lancelot liberates the King, he finds Gamille in bed with her lover, Gadraselain, whose ladylove she has imprisoned out of spite. Sir Kay liberates the damsel who had been imprisoned for three years for loving the knight and it is she who reveals that Camille's books on magic must be destroyed if she is to be subdued. It seems that Camille has forced herself upon Gadraselain who lacks the moral force to liberate his beloved. Gamille seems one of those competitive women who finds delight in pursuing unavailable men or men who love other women.

In this, she resembles Morgain. Gamille meets a rather bad end when she attempts suicide by jumping off a high rock in despair over the destruction of her

books on enchantment. Although King Arthur expresses regret over the maiden's fate, the love between them is not very well developed and her conduct borders on prostitution. Gamille sleeps with King Arthur only because of his kingly status and utility to her brother in the game of conquest and when this end has been achieved, she sleeps with another more alluring, perhaps younger, man. When Gamille attempts to commit suicide out of despair, it is not for the loss of a lover, as was the case with famous Dido in the *Roman d'Eneas*, but for the power she can gain over men through her books on magic.

A similar incident occurs in the case of the False Guinevere who challenges Guinevere's legitimacy as Arthur's true consort. Elspeth Kennedy connects this episode to the identity or "fair unknown" theme, which is developed first in relation to Lancelot and then applied to Guinevere when Lancelot battles to prove Guinevere's authenticity as Arthur's true wife.<sup>21</sup> This follows the pattern described earlier where the merits of both men and women are tested through adventure in order to determine their placement in the hierarchy of moral virtue. Guinevere's reclaimed identity is not based on a test of her personal integrity, but rather on her legitimacy as Arthur's true wife in spite of her infidelity. There are two versions of the False Guinevere episode, a short one where the identity of the false Guinevere is unknown, and a longer one in which she is Guinevere's half-sister, born of her father's adulterous liaison with his seneschal's wife. As observed elsewhere, the offspring of adulterous children create social chaos and the breakdown of social structure. Like Gamille, the False Guinevere does not act alone in attempting to win Arthur's love.

Old Berthelais, who has a grudge against Arthur, orchestrates the False Guinevere's usurpation of her half-sister's role. The intervention of Old Berthelais thrusts us back to the feudal order and one of its favorite themes, vengeance. A magic potion in the short, perhaps more primitive version, further induces Arthur to succumb to the False Guinevere's advances. In the end the Church and divine punishment in the form of illness bring the False Guinevere and Berthelais to confess their deception so that Arthur is forced to take back his legal wife. Arthur's second transgression of his marriage vows has more severe consequences than the first in that it threatens to break down the very structure of his marriage and, by extension, the integrity of his kingdom when the pope intervenes to force him to resume relations with the true Guinevere.

Miranda Griffin reads the False Guinevere as a reflection, *Doppelgänger*, or duplication of the true Guinevere's infidelity and duplicitousness:

The true Guenevere's adultery poses a threat to the system of exchange upon which Arthur's kingdom is founded: the false Guenevere's sickness is, then, not only

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<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, 45–48.

punishment for her impersonation of the queen, but for the queen's own failure to maintain her position in the social structure. The corruption of the queen's adulterous body is recoded by the disgusting rotting body of her replacement.<sup>22</sup>

Although Guinevere's moral rottenness and eventual decline may be mirrored in the fate of the False Guinevere, King Arthur fares no better, for his sexual dalliance also threatens the very stability of his reign and his first act of infidelity with Gamille the Enchantress occurred the very night of Guinevere's first lovemaking with Lancelot. The sanctity of King Arthur's kingdom rests fully on the ability of both king and queen to maintain their sexuality within the confines of marriage lest interlopers use sexual advantage for political gains. Previously, Guinevere used her influence over Lancelot to Arthur's advantage when she established peace between Galehaut and King Arthur.

With regard to King Arthur, adulterous relations are prompted from without by masculine rivals who have something to gain from the king's sexual dalliances: Hargadabranz hopes to subjugate the king militarily, while Berthelais has the axe of vengeance to grind. Women become pawns in a game of political chess so it is hard to know whether Gamille or the False Guinevere would have chosen to sleep with King Arthur on their own, although both women seem to enjoy their physical relations with him. The feudal subtext of conquest and masculine rivalry lurks below the surface of these love affairs. It appears that association with the power embodied in the person of the king becomes an aphrodisiac for these women.<sup>23</sup> The very opposite holds true for the women who fall in love with Lancelot, for their love is inspired from within by Lancelot's prowess and the very sight of his strength and comeliness.

The first major female character to experience love for Lancelot is the Lady of Malohaut who has imprisoned Lancelot as punishment for the homicide of one of her knights. She lightens the penalty by allowing him to practice chivalry during the day as long as he returns to his prison cell in the evening. When she suspects that Lancelot is the mysterious knight who is winning the war between King Arthur and Galehaut, she and her handmaiden decide to look in on him while he sleeps to see if his body bears signs of battle. As they peer into his room, they see that Lancelot is naked with the covers drawn up to his chest, yet leaving his strong arms exposed. The Lady of Malohaut rushes forward to kiss him and is stopped and reprimanded by her lady-in-waiting who suggests that such conduct is unseemly, especially since one can surmise that Lancelot already has a ladylove

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<sup>22</sup> Miranda Griffin, *The Object and the Cause in the Vulgate Cycle* (London: Legenda. Modern Humanities Research Association; Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2005), 129.

<sup>23</sup> Men and women of high rank are often pursued by those who wish to gain power or glory from them: Yseut is pursued by Cariodo and Guinevere by both Meleageant and Galehaut who had contemplated abducting her.

judging from his prowess. Here and elsewhere female desire most often is kindled and sustained when men are in a state of vulnerability, either asleep in bed or forced to lie in bed because of wounds or illness.<sup>24</sup> Both the healing damsel (*demoiselle guérisseuse*) and the Lady of Escalot fall in love with Lancelot while attending to a physical infirmity that keeps him in bed. In this dormant state Lancelot becomes the object of the female gaze, a passive recipient of feminine desire. Later, the Queen of the Land of Soresan, who finds Lancelot asleep in the forest, summons her companions Morgain and Queen Sedile to admire him. The lady of Soresan exclaims:

Par Dieu, dame, vos poez bien dire que onques mais ne veistes si bel tousel. Si m'aïst Diex, a mon avis molt se porroit prisier la dame qui de tel tousel avroit la seingnorie et pleust ore a Dieu que il m'amast autant com chevaliers ama onques plus damoisele. Si m'aïst Diex, je m'en tandroie a plus riche que se je avoie toutes les terres dou monde en mon demainne (Vol.7, 174).

[By God, ladies, you can certainly agree you've never seen a more handsome young man! So help me God, I think that any lady who gets the mastery of him can consider herself fortunate, and would God that he come to love me as much as ever a knight loved a maiden. So help me God, I'd think myself richer than if I had all the lands of the earth in my dominion (Vol.3, 155-56).]

The three ladies then proceed to fight amongst themselves over who is more worthy to love this knight, who looks more like a supernatural being than a mortal man.<sup>25</sup> Morgain intervenes, telling the ladies to put a spell on him until they can transport him in a litter to Cart Castle where he is made their prisoner. When Lancelot awakens, the ladies make his release contingent upon his choosing one of them for a mistress, which he refuses. After Lancelot spends a miserable period of time in this prison, a young maiden takes pity on him and releases him in exchange for his service in battle.

The most curious incidence of female lust concerning Lancelot involves Amite, the mother of Galaad. As the porter of the Grail during the services held at the castle of Corbenic, Amite's virginity and high lineage, qualities reminiscent of the Virgin Mary, make her the ideal maiden to bear Galaad, whose life parallels that of Christ. Since it is unseemly that such a virgin engage willfully in lustful activities, her physical union with Lancelot is pre-arranged by Brisane, Amite's female guardian, who makes the coupling take place by means of a magic potion.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Another case in point is Blanscheffur in Gottfried's *Tristan* who, disguised as a nurse, makes love with Rivalin as he lies wounded in bed.

<sup>25</sup> For a satirical travesty of this scene of women fighting against each other over a sexually attractive man, see the contribution to this volume by Albrecht Classen ("Sexual Desire and Pornography").

<sup>26</sup> A certain distaste for the coupling that results in the production of offspring necessitates the use of magic potions to this end in the case of Lancelot and Bohort (who engenders Helain le Blanc).

The union is blessed by divine providence in that a child is born of the coupling despite the devious circumstances of the child's conception. It is only after giving birth that Amite becomes enflamed with desire for Lancelot and has Brisane trick Lancelot a second time into sleeping with her without the use of a potion. Once Amite has tasted the joys of lovemaking, she finds another coupling quite irresistible in spite of her knowledge of Lancelot's love for Guinevere and the trickery she must use to lure him to her bed. As an unmarried woman and mother of Galaad, Amite perhaps feels that she has more right to Lancelot's affection than Guinevere. Unfortunately, their lovemaking occurs in the presence of Guinevere, which leads to her banishment of Lancelot and his exile from Arthur's realm. This plays inadvertently into Amite's hands, however, for after a bout of madness brought on by his exile and after mindless wandering, Lancelot is brought to King Pelles's castle where Amite tends to his health. Amite's time with Lancelot is short-lived, however: Lancelot does not remain at Corbenic long, for his desire is entirely focused on Guinevere and we learn in the *Queste* that Amite has died, perhaps out of unrequited love, making her one in a series of victims of unfulfilled desire for Lancelot.

One portion of the romance where women engage freely in sexual relationships of their choosing is during the quest for Lancelot where many female characters engage in casual love affairs with minor knights as they seek Lancelot. This section is the most erotic in that the minor characters have freer range in sexual matters due to their lower social status and correspondingly cruder sexual mores.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere I compared and contrasted the love and/or sexual relationships of

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Another instance occurs in the *Queste* when Adam and Eve are required to copulate in order to produce offspring to replace the tenth legion of angels that was lost to Lucifer. Since the act of copulation seems distasteful to them, God allows a cloud of darkness to descend over the couple so that they may accomplish their mission in the comfort of darkness, without feeling the shame of their nakedness. Another interesting commentary on sexuality seems to imply that lust existed in heaven among the angels before they fell: "Et trovons escrit que quant il furent fait angele, que il furent si bel et si plaisant que il se delitoient a regarder l'un l'autre jusques a l'escaufement de luxure. Et quant il furent keü avoec lor caitif maistre, il retindrent la luxure en terre que il avoient es haus sieges commenchiés" (Vol. 7, 39; "We find it written that when they were still angels, they were so beautiful and attractive that they delighted in looking at each other to the point of burning with lust. And once they had fallen (along with their sorry master), they kept on earth the lasciviousness that had begun in the high reaches of heaven," (Vol. 2, 11).

<sup>27</sup> One poignant example of such eroticism is Helient who delivers this message to Gauvain via her elder sister: "Je ris, fait ele, por les folies del siecle, car j'ai une moie seror plus jone de moi qui a juré qu'ele ne donra ja son puchelage se a vous non; et mes peres n'a plus de tous enfans que nous .II., si l'a gardee si par paor de vous que nus ne la puet veoir" (Vol. 8, 234; "I'm smiling," she said, "because of the follies of the world. I have a younger sister who has sworn that she would surrender her virginity to no one but you. My father has no other children than us two, and he has kept her so close out of fear of you that no one can see her;" Vol. II, 175).

Agravain and the Damsel of the Chair (eldest daughter of the King of Norgales), Gauvain and Helient (youngest daughter of the King of Norgales), Hector and the Lord of the Estroite Marche's daughter and Bohort and the King of Brangoire's daughter, finding subtle similarities and differences in the pattern of these less serious love affairs.<sup>28</sup>

In each instance the maiden, for whom the knight must engage in combat, represents an implied marriage between persons of compatible rank, yet the knight must reject the alliance since the exigencies of knighthood exclude marriage. Another type of lustful female associated with Lancelot is the *demoiselle tentatrice* or "tempting damsel." This damsel, who tries to seduce Lancelot, is not really in love with him, but rather she has been sent by another agent to discredit him. She is used as a lure by Morgain to tempt Lancelot into deceiving Guinevere while he is in her prison. Similarly, in the part of the romance that corresponds to Chrétien's *Chevalier de la Charrette*, this damsel represents more directly a test of Lancelot's love for Guinevere and constitutes one of a series of adventures that take place in the Marvelous Bed. This damsel resembles Gamille and the False Guinevere in that her seductive powers are used to corrupt a major knight, and the damsel becomes a pawn of someone else's evil scheme.

Before concluding this essay, I would like to touch upon one final character, Morgain, who plays a role opposite to that of the Lady of the Lake, in that she acts as an agent against *fin' amor* by trying to bring harm to her rival, Guinevere.<sup>29</sup> Whereas the Lady of the Lake sanctions female *jouissance*, despite being herself a virgin, by sending Guinevere the Split Shield as a reminder of the sexual wholeness true love can bring, the lascivious Morgain hates Guinevere and tries whenever possible to separate the lovers by imprisoning Lancelot. It is largely due to Morgain's enmity that the adulterous love affair is revealed to King Arthur, which partly leads to the destruction of his realm, through a mural that Lancelot paints on the walls of Morgain's prison depicting his love for the Queen. Morgain's hatred for Guinevere stems from a forbidden love affair she had with the Queen's nephew Guiamor de Tarmelide. Since knowledge of the liaison would displease King Arthur, perhaps leading to Guiamor's death, Guinevere catches the two lovers in *flagrante delicto* as proof of their wrongdoing and convinces Guaimor to abandon Morgain, who by now has become pregnant. In her distress Morgain decides to seek out the help of Merlin in order to find solace in learning from him the arts of magic. It is through Lancelot that Morgain hopes to inflict revenge upon Guinevere, for she suspects Guinevere loves Lancelot:

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<sup>28</sup> Stacey L. Hahn, "The Motif of the Errant Knight and the Royal Maiden," *Arthurian Interpretations* 3, 1 (Fall 1988): 1–15.

<sup>29</sup> Kennedy, *Lancelot and the Grail*, 286–87.



Por ce fu la haine qu'ele ot envers la roine Genievre tos les jors de sa vie: puis se pensa, quant ele vit Lancelot, que par ce la porroit ele plus corroier que par nule autre chose, kar bien cuidoit savoir qu'ele l'amoit por ce k'il avoit plus fait d'armes por li que onques autres chevaliers n'avoit fet por autre dame (Vol. 1, 301–02).

[That explains the hatred that she felt for the Queen Guenevere throughout the days of her life. She decided, when she saw Lancelot, that through him she could cause her greater distress than by any other means, for she was quite sure that the queen loved him, because he had performed greater feats of arms for her than any other knight had ever done for any other lady (Vol. 2, 311)].

Larrington suggests that Morgain's enmity against Guinevere may have several motivations, such as concern for her brother's honor, that has been marred by Guinevere's infidelity, jealousy at having been displaced in Arthur's affections by her sister-in-law or simply her own lust for Lancelot. As Elspeth Kennedy has observed, Morgain figures more strongly in the latter part of the *Lancelot* proper where "she plays with appearance and reality as she keeps Lancelot in prison, hidden by her spells from the knights looking for him who are therefore doomed to failure . . ."<sup>30</sup> In opposition to the Lake where Lancelot was raised with all the necessary social amenities so that he might one day leave and become an accomplished knight, Morgain creates a feminine space that is a kind of "anti-Lake," the Valley of No Return or Valley of False Lovers, where men are held prisoner for acts of infidelity. No knight who enters Morgain's magical valley may return if he has betrayed his mistress in thought or in deed. Morgain created the Valley when she caught her lover in the arms of another woman. In this way Morgain hopes to imprison her lover indefinitely, for she believes no man capable of being utterly faithful to his mistress.

Only a knight who has been true to his mistress in thought and in deed may break the spell of the enchantment and liberate the Valley of its male prisoners. To her dismay Lancelot proves to be the sole knight capable of putting an end to the enchantment, thus liberating scores of men and perhaps making Morgain all the more jealous, for Guinevere alone enjoys the sort of love that Morgain craves and has never experienced, a true love in body and soul. It is ironic, though, that Morgain's lust produces offspring and Guinevere's more refined love encompassing thought and deed does not, which may be a mark of its disinterested or perhaps sinful nature—sinful at least according to the teachings of the Church—freed from the bonds of procreation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Elspeth Kennedy, "Variations in the Patterns of Interlace in the Lancelot-Grail," *The Lancelot-Grail Cycle: Text and Transformations*, ed. William W. Kibler (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), 31–50; here 41.

<sup>31</sup> Adulterous queens like Guinevere and Isolde are rarely fertile. But see the study of Marie de France's *Lais* by Molly Robinson Kelly in this volume.

Morgain's love is possessive and cloying while both the Lady of the Lake and Guinevere take delight in Lancelot's freedom to develop his valor through adventure. Larrington does point out, however, that the Lady of the Lake and Guinevere succeed where Morgain does not because they are closely aligned with chivalric values; hence, they represent a non-threatening form of femininity that can be more easily integrated into patriarchal social norms.<sup>32</sup> She goes on to state that "Morgain represents separately defined female interests within chivalry; champion of a private, life-sustaining domain that is often in opposition to the public performance of knightly deeds and the daily demand to inflict and sustain violence."<sup>33</sup> By confining men within her private space, Morgain upsets the social order by removing chivalry from love and defining love on her own terms. She reveals that "women's desire may not be as closely aligned with male interests as the ethic of courtesy pretends."<sup>34</sup>

Although the general lesson of the *Lancelot-Grail* as it unfolds leads to a condemnation of the courtly ethic of *fin' amor* and a very traditional view of women that preaches against adultery and in favor of virginity, the preponderance of the cycle illustrates on a very large scale that women do appreciate male beauty, feel lust, and enjoy lovemaking. The symbol of this love is best expressed through the magic of the Lady of the Lake's Split Shield that embraces the wholeness of love, both body and soul, and allows women to view themselves as whole beings in their relationships with men. The shield also has healing properties for when Lancelot goes mad shortly after having consummated his love with Guinevere, the Split Shield heals him, and later the Lady of the Lake plies him with a healing ointment when he goes mad once again.

While it is perhaps true that the Split Shield, as Miranda Griffin asserts, reflects the "relative instability of Lancelot's identity" and "the breakdown and fragmentation to which his body is subject" [118], according to a Lacanian interpretation of love, which sees in love relationships the fragmentation of the individual caused by the troubling consciousness of "difference," the shield does harken back to a pagan, and sometimes medical, belief that sex has healing properties, just as later in the *Queste* Galaad's virginity in both mind and body will allow him to heal King Mordain, the Roi Mehaignié and make whole the male counterpart to the Split Shield, the Split Sword. The Split Shield emphasizes the spiritual nature of love (unlike the magic potions that coerce sexual relations upon a reluctant male for the purpose of generating the species) as primary in that it is the top half which is whole, implying mutual attraction, and the bottom half of the shield, the part signifying sexual union, that is rent and needs to be

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<sup>32</sup> Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses*, 66.

<sup>33</sup> Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses*, 75.

<sup>34</sup> Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses*, 66.

accomplished.<sup>35</sup> Sexuality is a step on the way to spiritual wholeness, not the stopping point, but part of the progression as one evolves toward love of God.

The desire for sexual union in nature is a reflection of that urge to join with another, which is developed further when such love engages more than the organs of generation. The Split Shield has a positive connotation, that of wholeness in love, for those women who have the courage to affirm their desire for love by rejecting the social constraints of a loveless marriage. This love does imply compromise in that it must accommodate femininity within the masculine world of chivalry. At the other extreme is Morgain's world, where men are reduced to the level of sexual slaves, always at the whim of their possessive and disappointed jailor, who yearns for men's hearts, but must make do with their bodies. Between the two extremes are the various women who populate the *Lancelot-Grail* and whose experiences fall somewhere in between.

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<sup>35</sup> The Split Shield and magic potions seem to be the female counterparts of physical force and law (marriage), both of which are used by men to coerce women into sexual relations.

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## Sausages, Nuts, and Eggs: Food Imagery, the Body, and Sexuality in the Old French *Fabliaux*

In the gritty, carnal world of the thirteenth-century Old French *fabliaux*, sex is revealed to be as essential to life as food and is often devoid of any romantic or spiritual aspect.<sup>1</sup> Though in this corpus sexual activity is portrayed repeatedly as excessive, sinful, criminal, adulterous, blasphemous, or violent, it is nonetheless shown as just a part of life, just one of many human needs to be explored with realism and humor. The *fabliaux* expose bodies and bodily appetites without shame, confirming what Albrecht Classen has shown in his introduction to this volume that sexual shame is not necessarily evident in the European literature of this period. Only a few extant *fabliaux* do not deal with sexuality or sexually active figures in some way.<sup>2</sup> Shamelessly, the *fabliaux* engage in a highly physical discourse. Consequently, the human body, male and female, with its many appetites, weaknesses, and bodily functions or fluids, is explored in graphic detail with comic realism or comic exaggeration in several *fabliaux*.<sup>3</sup> While some genitalia

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<sup>1</sup> Albeit not as frequently as graphic images of sexuality, images of romantic or conventional courtly love do appear in the *fabliaux*; Norris J. Lacy demonstrates the importance of courtly love and its relationship to marriage, sex, and romantic relationships in the *fabliaux* of *Aloul*, *Le chevalier qui recovra l'amor de sa dame*, *Guillaume au Faucon*, and *Auberee*, which do not focus on sex and do incorporate elements of courtly love as seen conventionally in romance, in Norris J. Lacy, "Sex and Love in the *Fabliaux*," *Sex, Love, and Marriage in Medieval Literature and Reality: Thematische Beiträge im Rahmen des 31th International Congress on Medieval Studies an der Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo—USA) 8.–12. Mai 1996*, ed. Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok. Wodan: Greifswalder Beiträge zum Mittelalter. Etudes médiévales de Greifswald, 69 (Greifswald: Reineke-Verlag, 2000), 41–46.

<sup>2</sup> Male and female sexually active *fabliaux* characters have been categorized by social class and by ecclesiastical rank by John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France Around 1200*. The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 252–54. For an overview on specifically "erotic" *fabliaux*, see the list by Adrian Tudor, "Fabliaux," *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature*, ed. Gaetan Brulotte and John Phillips (New York: Routledge, 2006), 445–47.

<sup>3</sup> For several examples and analogies of comic sexual from late-medieval German literature, see the

literally speak for themselves in the *fabliaux*, as in the often-cited graphic *Le chevalier qui fist les cons parler* [The Knight who Made Cunts/Asses Speak] (NRCF 15),<sup>4</sup> still other body parts are likened to food items in a complex exploration of human appetites. The present study demonstrates how food imagery is used to treat with little inhibition an array of sexual subjects, evidently hot topics in the contemporary *fabliaux* erotic imagination, ranging from masturbation to seduction and arousal, from ejaculation to fertility and impotence.

When juxtaposed, humorous representations of sexual and food terms have subversive and comic possibilities. Consumption becomes a metaphor for sexual activity, while food objects become real or imaginary stand-ins for sex organs. Often scatological or erotic in nature, the *fabliaux* confound major human needs, desires, excesses, and fears, and treat them with humor, more so than in other contemporary or prior genres.<sup>5</sup> Food play, word play, and sex play characterize the *fabliaux*. Larry Crist has pointed out the ubiquitous combination of what he terms the “*gastrographie*” and “*pornographie*” of the *fabliaux* corpus.<sup>6</sup> Building on his notion of food and sex as primary themes in the genre, the present study suggests reading discourse on food and discourse on sex together in these texts, moving beyond the notion of food scenes as recurring motifs or sexual details as mere pornographic scenes. It would be anachronistic to refer to the *fabliaux* as pointless pornography, as some critics have done, if we even can call them pornographic in the modern sense of the word. In the *fabliaux*, food objects are not used to cover up talk of sexuality; on the contrary, sexual usage of food further adorns the corporeal fabric of the genre with flesh and edible flesh.

The *fabliau* of *Le Prestre qui avevete* [The Peeping Priest] (NRCF 98) demonstrates how eating and sexual activity may be viewed as one and the same in this genre. In this tale a voyeuristic priest spies through a peephole a couple at home while they are having dinner, “Quant il uint si s’aresta / Pres de l’uis et si esgarda / Par .i. pertruis garde et si uoit / Que li villains mengue et boit” [ll. 22–26; When he stopped at the door, he looked inside and through a hole he saw that the peasant was eating and drinking]. When the voyeuristic priest asks what they are doing

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contribution to this volume by Albrecht Classen (“Sexual Desire and Pornography”).

<sup>4</sup> All *fabliaux* references refer to the NRCF edition, *Nouveau recueil complet des fabliaux*, ed. Willem Noomen and Nico Boogaard. 10 vols. (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1983–1986).

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Melhado White, “Sexual Language and Human Conflict in Old French *Fabliaux*,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24.2 (1982): 185–210, looks at interpersonal communication, comparing the human relationships in the *fabliaux* to other genres within their cultural context, suggesting that an emphasis on sexuality and sexual tension is new to the sexually-explicit *fabliaux* genre.

<sup>6</sup> Larry S. Crist, “Gastrographie et pornographie dans les *fabliaux*,” *Continuations: Essays on Medieval French Literature and Language in Honor of John L. Grigsby*, ed. Norris J. Lacy and Gloria Torrini-Roblin (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1989), 251–61. Crist also provides a concordance of several foodstuffs appearing in the *fabliaux* here.

the peasant replies innocently, "Par moi foi sire nous mengons," [l. 35, By my faith sir, we are eating].<sup>7</sup> The priest replies that it appears from the outside instead as if they were fornicating and accuses them of lying, "Mengiés faites vous l'mentés / J'l m'est auis que vous foutés . . . Vous foutés car ie le voi bien" [ll. 37–38, 43; Eating? You are lying. I can see that you are fornicating . . . You were fornicating, because I saw it well]. This language shows clearly the juxtaposition of culinary and sexual activity so prevalent in the *fabliaux* corpus. When the gullible husband goes outside to the keyhole to verify this visual anomaly and see if the priest is right, the lecherous priest proceeds to derobe the wife and have sex with her (possibly a case of rape) at the dinner table, thereby proving his observation to the credulous husband and satisfying his own desires with the wife. The moral of the story given by the narrator is a double entendre referring to both the keyhole and the vagina, "Et pour ce que li uis fu tuis / Dist on encore maint fol paist dius," [ll. 82–24; They say one hole may please many fools.] As in this tale, sexuality is at the forefront and the use and misuse of food and kitchen objects or dining spaces are employed as subversive means to address societal and sexual tensions in many *fabliaux*, tending to amplify anticlerical messages in particular. The actions of the kitchen and the bedroom become analogous.

At the same time, humorous analogy between foodstuffs and genitalia also would have been easily recognizable by *fabliaux* audiences, whether urban or courtly. The food imagery and culinary word-play used to treat the subject of female and male sexuality in general, and genitalia more specifically, is most central in what may be termed here the culino-erotic narratives explored as examples below: *L'Esquiere* [*The Squirrel*], *Aloul*, *Le Sacristain moine* [*The Sacristy Monk*], *La dame qui avoine demandoit pour Morel* [*The Woman who Asked for Oats for Morel the Horse*], *Les Perdris* [*The Partridges*], *Porcelet* [*Piglet*], and *Le Sohait* [*The Wish*], with reference to other relevant texts.

The sin of gluttony is associated with the Original Sin, with Eve's pleasure in consumption of the forbidden apple (still an enduring symbolic fruit favored by thirteenth-century *fabliaux* and theater temptresses) and as such, gluttony is considered a sin that leads to the other sins of lechery, sloth, and envy.<sup>8</sup> Because

<sup>7</sup> For an exploration of looking and voyeurism in Old French and Middle English romance, see A.C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur* (1993; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), which considers how private love is made public through peeping and eavesdropping, and how the narrator also may function as a voyeur. See also Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text*. *Medieval Cultures*, 26 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 212–14.

<sup>8</sup> The apple appears frequently in medieval literature as a symbol of sexuality and gluttony, see, for example, Adam de la Halle's comic *Jeu de Robin et Marion*, a mid-thirteenth-century French secular play that features a picnic and food play and a Marion who hides apples and cheeses in the bosom of her dress; Adam de la Halle. *Le jeu de Robin et Marion*, ed. and trans. Shira I. Schwamb-Baird (New York and London: Garland, 1994).

gluttony is seen as leading to lechery in particular, the two are connected in the seriously didactic or merely entertaining messages of the *fabliaux*. Gluttony, indicative of other forms of immorality and lack of self-control, had to be avoided in order to achieve penitence, purity, and devotion as indicated in religious and secular texts of the period, particularly in periods of religious fast or famine. *fabliaux* characters are pained by hunger and motivated by lust, their excesses openly making a mockery of other contemporary didactic literature that speaks out against gluttony and lechery.

The Old French *fableors* have few qualms about their incessant naming of genitalia or sexual activity to illustrate sexual and alimentary gluttony, as for example in the uninhibited titles *Le fouteor, Connebert, La Crote, Celle qui fu foutue et desfoutue por une Grue*,<sup>9</sup> *Berangier au long cul, L'anel qui faisait les vis grands et roides, La Coille noir, Les Putains et des Lecheors, La Dame escoillee, Les trois Dames qui trouverent un Vit*, the aforementioned *Le Chevalier qui fist parler les Cons*, the ironically titled *De la mere qui defandait sa fille vit a nomer*, and others. On at least two levels their messages about sexuality are enhanced by relating genitals to food in those tales with culino-erotic imagery: 1. *Fabliau* didactic messages about human needs and weaknesses are enhanced and 2. the social humor and entertainment value of the narrative doubles, with this unique form of humor juxtaposing the two human universals of food and sexuality.

Statistically speaking, the most commonly consumed food items in approximately one hundred fifty extant *fabliaux* are: bacon and sausage, poultry, cakes, bread, and wine; given the frequency and the potentially high cost in the diet, these items are often the main ingredients of culinary comedy. In the *fabliaux*, poultry, fish, and bacon become objects in the endless gender tug-of-war, a sort of currency in an economy of sexual and culinary exchanges. Appetite for cooked poultry is associated with both sexual appetite and financial greed in women and by extension, eating poultry becomes a sexual activity.

Large meals, particularly those with poultry or game meat as a main dish, appear as aphrodisiacs for adulterous lovers, as Connie Scarborough has noted in her discussion of the Spanish tradition, especially Juan Ruiz's *Libro de buen amor*, in which the figure of lusty La Chata feeds a man rabbit, partridge, wine, cheese,

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<sup>9</sup> Keith Busby draws a comparison between the wordplay and use of euphemism in *La Grue* and *L'Esquiel*. He remarks that in the former there is a naïve woman who does not understand the verb *foutre* and in the latter another young woman accepts the animal euphemisms for male genitalia because she may not use openly sexual terms, as "*La Grue* depends, like the squirrel-poem, on the discrepancy between a word and knowledge of its meaning," Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*. Faux Titre, 221 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 446. See also the *fabliau* *La Damoisele qui ne pooit oïr parler de foutre* [The Damsel who could not hear talk of fornicating] (NCRF 26).

milk, and bread as part of her aggressive plan of seduction and temptation.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the way to a man or woman's genitalia is through their stomach in the *fabliaux*.<sup>11</sup> Gluttony for *char*, *viande*, and *vin* [flesh, food, and wine] are connected to lechery and sins of the flesh while some fruits are viewed as aphrodisiacs in the Old French *fabliaux*, romance, and drama. Wordplay, innuendo, and rhyme with *char/chair*, or with the broad associated semantic field of meat/flesh/carnal, are common.<sup>12</sup> With a strong anticlerical message, pork, bacon, sausage, lard, and larders come to represent corrupt, greedy, and lecherous members of the clergy, as symbols of gluttony, greed, lust, with the suggestion of corporeal resemblance to meat (and no doubt because pork signified Christian in opposition to Muslim in that period).<sup>13</sup> Round or phallic shapes of foods of particular relevance in the Middle Ages, such as nuts, radishes, eggs, onions, roots, asparagus, carrots, cucumbers, sausages, etc., are associated with male genitalia, while eggs cross gender lines; one of the most common staples in the thirteenth century; grains, oats and other porridges are likened to bodily fluids, metaphors for semen, insemination, and fertility in general. Hung cured meats such as bacon, ham, and sausages are the foods most associated with male sexuality, or male genitalia. By extension, cutting meat represents castration.

Fertility (represented by eggs and chickens, oatmeal, etc.), marriage (represented by nightly meals, pantries, dinner tables, larders, etc.),<sup>14</sup> and sexuality (represented by sausages and other flesh, and oatmeal) are all treated through the techniques of what I have termed "culinary comedy."<sup>15</sup> Sexual appetites and gluttony in

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<sup>10</sup> See also Connie Scarborough's contribution to this volume.

<sup>11</sup> Eva Parra, in her contribution to this volume, has observed that in Hrotsvit's legend *Gongolf* the male lover's center of sexual pleasure rests in his intestines, which, however, explode upon God's command as punishment for his adultery.

<sup>12</sup> For a insightful examination of innuendoes, see the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph.

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion of the complex functions of food humor in the *fabliaux*, see my chapter "Much Ado about Bacon: The Old French *Fabliaux*," in my book *Culinary Comedy in Medieval French Literature* (Purdue: Purdue University Press, 2006), and Kristin L. Burr's article focusing on pigs and bacon in this corpus, "Hamming it Up: Porcine Humor in the Old French *Fabliaux*," *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2007), 7–18.

<sup>14</sup> The *fabliaux* and the fifteenth-century collection of the *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* include adulterous lovers, usually men of the cloth, who hide in larders or cabinets to escape jealous husband. Sexual activity in and around the kitchen and in and around confined spaces is common in these texts; on the attraction of the latter, see Cary Howie, *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature*. The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). On the delineation between public and private in the period, private spaces and private bodily functions, such as urination, the *fabliaux* genre and Chaucer, see Thomas J. Farrell, "Privacy and the Boundaries of *Fabliau* in *The Miller's Tale*," *English Literary History*, 56.4 (1989): 773–95.

<sup>15</sup> For further explanation of my theory of culinary comedy and other aspects of the phenomenon of food humor in *fabliaux*, romance, epic, drama, and the *Roman de Renart*, see Sarah Gordon,



relation to gender are more freely explored through culinary comedy. Contemporary views on libido and sexual morality, perceptions of human anatomy, conceptions on fertility, and ideas about sexual behaviors are all amplified through the techniques of culinary comedy in the *fabliaux*.

*L'Esquiritel* [The Squirrel] (NRCF 58) treats human sexuality and sexual inexperience through animal and food imagery and word play. Genitalia are often anthropomorphized, likened to animals, or given the power of speech in the Old French *fabliaux* and German *maeren*, and the male genitalia in this narrative are no exception. A young woman is forbidden by her mother to speak of male genitalia in this tale, presumably some small indication of an existent contemporary taboo. A clever would-be suitor takes advantage of this chaste maternal decree in order to satisfy his sexual desires by referring to his penis as a squirrel and claiming that his testicles are eggs that the squirrel has lain. Comically, the biological impossibility of male squirrels laying eggs plays on the woman's ignorance of male anatomy and reproduction in general (though granted, other biologically improbable details of reproduction do appear frequently in contemporary bestiaries). After she has asked if the squirrel eats nuts, she regrets that she herself has eaten many nuts the previous day and has none left to share with him, once again confounding sexual appetite or activity and eating. This move is not unique to the French tradition, for example Connie Scarborough's chapter in this volume also discusses similar common sexual innuendos with nuts that appear in the Spanish *Libro de buen amor*.<sup>16</sup>

In *L'Esquiritel*, animal craving for food is equated with male desire for intercourse; the knight suggests that the squirrel could enter the lady's stomach through her vagina and then feast on the nuts allegedly still digesting in her belly. Curiously, in a rare move, here the nuts simultaneously represent not only testicles, but also the female body or female fertility; because they are inside her belly and involved potentially in the act of insemination of the womb. The obliging, or aroused, young woman allows the so-called squirrel to search for food on and in her body. The comical and scatological circumlocution continues as the male orgasm is described as the squirrel "eating its fill and spitting, crying, vomiting the food after eating" (ll. 163–66), thus tying together the acts of consumption, ejaculation, and insemination. Following intercourse, the still credulous woman becomes distraught that she may have broken one of the squirrel's eggs, perhaps a reference to breaking her hymen or male ejaculation, or

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*Culinary Comedy in Medieval French Literature*. Some of my analyses of *fabliaux* in the present chapter have grown out of my earlier study.

<sup>16</sup> See also the German *mære* "The Knight with the Hazelnuts" (no. 14) in *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*, Selected and trans. by Albrecht Classen. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 328 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 91–94.

both. This narrative thus presents imagery of copulation, female virginity, ejaculation, orgasm, insemination, and fertility, all given simultaneously in alimentary terms.

The *fabliau* Aloul (NRCF 14) also turns sexual play into food play, with an unexpected comic twist and an anticlerical message. *Aloul* presents the *fabliaux* stereotypes of the lusty priest and the unfaithful wife, whose identities are constructed by what they eat.<sup>17</sup> She is the familiar figure of the *mal mariée* and as for her husband, he “garda sa fame com jalous” (l. 255; he watched his wife with jealousy).<sup>18</sup> The figure of the oppressed wife seeks vengeance on her possessive husband as well as her own sexual fulfillment. The linguistic play in *L'Esquirl* is similar to the humorous verbal intercourse in *Aloul*, in which the priest refers to his penis as a food object to be consumed, suggesting that the woman consume his root, which he describes as large and medicinal, for her breakfast.<sup>19</sup>

One day, the cuckolded husband Aloul sends his hungry, stubborn servant to fetch bacon from the cellar. Unbeknownst to him, the priest has been attacked and hung naked in the cellar for revenge. The unsuspecting servant feels around the rafters in the dark of the storeroom, mistaking the hung priest's buttocks for lumpy soft cheese rennet and his penis for a sausage just hung up to dry. Sausages are inherently funny foods, and here the narrator highlights the comic association with the male body. Because sausages resemble the shape of male genitalia and because the process of sausage making includes the action of stuffing, they are often used in sexual and culinary humor. Moreover, sausages are composed of pieces of meat and other stuffing, ground or chopped, stuffed into casings of animal intestines; their fragmentary, unknown, mixed nature, and the fact that they are stuffed are also part of the sexual innuendo and comic interest.

The servant in this tale marvels at the wealth of meat hung to be dried and cured; this implicitly humorous remark demonstrates the stereotype of fat gluttonous wealthy priests so prevalent in the *fabliaux* and mock-ecclesiastical texts of the time. The threat of castration or genital mutilation provides dramatic

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<sup>17</sup> Perhaps in an intertextual and intergeneric reference highlighting her animal insatiability she is named Hersent, like the sexualized figure of Isengrin the wolf's wife in *Roman de Renart*.

<sup>18</sup> *Fabliaux* husbands are frequently characterized as cuckolds because of impotence, old age, absence, abusiveness, or unattractiveness. For a comparison of several *fabliaux* husbands, see Elizabeth W. Poe, “The Old and the Feckless: *fabliaux* Husbands,” *The Medieval Marriage Scene: Prudence, Passion, Policy*, ed. Sherry Roush and Cristelle L. Baskins. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 299 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 115–34.

<sup>19</sup> Root vegetables, like sausages, have been seen as phallic or sexual throughout several time periods and cultures, as Crumpacker explains, “Sausage is masculine because it looks so phallic . . . Most vegetables are obviously masculine. Think of root vegetables—carrots and beets and turnips and parsnips. The shape's the thing.” Bunny Crumpacker, *The Sex Life of Food: When Body and Soul Meet to Eat* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 23–24.

suspense, as the servant attempts to slice off a morsel of the “meat” and the priest, who is still alive, breaks free and falls on him, breaking the bones of the servant. Unaware of any crime, the injured servant curses the butcher who must have hung “the pig” there. The other farm hands arrive to investigate, only to find that the “meat” has apparently scampered off on its own, sausages, or genitalia, still intact. Here men become mere meat, meat to be prepared in the kitchen, or enjoyed in the bedroom.

*Le Sacristain moine* [The Sacristan Monk] (NRCF 74) and *Aloul* (NRCF 14) share many similarities as ecclesiastical culinary humor centers on priests’ bodies as “meat,” meaning items of sexual and dietary consumption. Both narratives are characterized by corporeality as they engage the audience with the spectacle of transgressive eating and transgressive bodies; moreover, both suggest an anticlerical message.<sup>20</sup>

*Le Sacristain* exists in six extant manuscripts and more than three different versions, attesting to its popularity. In this sexual narrative of adultery, jealousy, and prostitution, a lecherous priest is killed by the vengeful husband, as the monk attempts to pay the wife one hundred pounds stolen from the church for her favors. In a humorous scatological scene, the murderer comically attempts to conceal the offending lecherous body in the monks’ lavatory, slumped over a toilet, but the body mysteriously reappears on his doorstep. In a typical *fabliaux* cover-up solution, he buries the corpse in a farmer’s dung heap, with the narrative thereby equating nudity and sexuality with excrement and consumption. Coincidentally and quite ironically, another thief has recently stolen a slab of bacon and also hidden it in the dung heap, associating the priest’s sexual body with the bacon. At first he assumes that he has found another dead lecherous monk. In the comic reversal, it turns out to be not a cadaver, but rather a pig. This is the mirror image of the *Aloul* narrative. Meanwhile, the thief has the “bacon” fetched from storage with the intention of cutting it and preparing to cook it for a meal. It is not until the men begin to carve up the flesh that they notice that it is tough like a willow branch and that it wears footwear; in this comically understated scene, they seem only mildly surprised by the shoes. It is comic that nobody present remarks that it is in fact a monk, only that it has pants and shoes. The animality and corporeality of the clerical profession represented by the pig is

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<sup>20</sup> Anti-religious humor, character humor, and low-style humor appears not only in the *fabliaux* but also in the *chanson de geste* genre, as demonstrated by Ronald N. Walpole, “Humor and People in Twelfth-Century France,” *Romance Philology* 11 (1957–1958): 210–25.

part of a strong anticlerical message.<sup>21</sup> The connection between anticlerical satire on lusty priests and meat is unmistakable.

*Fabliaux* sexual culinary comedy does not focus only on male sexuality, nor is it necessarily misogynist.<sup>22</sup> *Les perdris* (NRCF 21), in which a wife resorts to verbal trickery to cover up her own gluttony, portrays a female sexualized body full of appetite and sexual desire, with gluttonous consumption replacing excessive sexual activity and presenting a probable image of female masturbation. The ravenous wife cannot contain her desire to devour the two fat partridges her husband has hunted. She has roasted the birds that are intended for dinner with the priest upon her husband's return.<sup>23</sup> Greedily the wife gobbles up the warm, juicy, roasted flesh before he arrives, expressing her private pleasure in eating them.<sup>24</sup> Sensually aroused by the smells and textures of the food and by her own hunger, desire overcomes her when, alone, she picks apart with her fingers and completely devours the flesh of the second partridge down to the bones in a frenzied loss of self-control.<sup>25</sup> This *fabliau* implies a connection between uncontrolled female culinary appetite and female sexual desire, with a suggestion of masturbation in her solitary enjoyment of the poultry.<sup>26</sup> Considering the way her private pleasure and physical satisfaction are described, the scene in which she

<sup>21</sup> See Brian J. Levy's chapter on "Comic Inversion: A Fabliau Bestiary" for an analysis of the use of different animals that appear, whether in sexual or food situations or not, in the Old French *fabliaux* in Brian J. Levy, *The Comic Text: Patterns and Images in the Old French Fabliaux*. Faux Titre, 186 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> An discussion of women's voices and body parts in the *fabliaux* that are not all misogynistic, particularly images of mouths and orifices, is offered by E. Jane Burns, "The Prick which is Not One: How Women Talk Back in Old French Fabliaux," *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury. New Cultural Studies, 4 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). See also her monograph *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> For a study on which birds were commonly eaten in this period and how they were cooked and served according to two extant late medieval household manuals, including partridge, see the chapter by Antoinette Saly, "Les oiseaux dans l'alimentation médiévale d'après le *Viandier de Taillevent* et le *Ménagier de Paris*," *Banquets et manières de table au moyen âge*. 2 vols. Sénéfiance, 38 (Aix-en-Provence: CUER MA, Université de Provence Provence, 1996), 2: 173–79.

<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of other explicit images of female activity and female pleasure as presented by the *fabliaux*, see Lisa Perfetti, "The Lewd and the Ludic: Female Pleasure in the *Fabliaux*," *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A. Crocker. Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 17–31.

<sup>25</sup> Cooking itself can be seen as a mentally or physically erotic activity, see Lisa M. Heldke, "Foodmaking as a Thoughtful Practice," ed. Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke, *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 222–23, which demonstrates that growing, preparing food, and cooking food both requires and generates "erotic energy."

<sup>26</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Rasma Lazda-Cazers. In a way, Juanita Feros Ruys also addresses this issue with her interpretation of Heloise's remarkable letter IV to Abelard, in which she reflects upon her past sexual desires and erotic dreams.

devours the birds is one of the most sensual scenes concentrating on the female body in the entire *fabliaux* corpus, even though it is about food.<sup>27</sup> She reacts with deception, as if she were just another *fabliaux* adulteress attempting to cover her sin with a lie.<sup>28</sup> First she blames the half-eaten food on the housecats. As her gullible husband returns home, she innocently tells him to go sharpen his knife in order to carve the birds, pretending nothing has happened.<sup>29</sup> She then changes her story and blames the disappearance of the birds on the unsuspecting priest, implicating him in her culino-erotic moment, and the husband pursues him for this. Roast partridge thus becomes an emblem of *fabliaux* deceitful women.<sup>30</sup>

She tells the priest that her husband is out to castrate him; when he runs away frightened, the hungry husband chases him with a knife yelling *double entendres*, such as: he will take them both back warm, or just abandon them on the spot if he gets caught, confounding the birds with testicles.<sup>31</sup>

Here the comedy is physical and verbal, as “they,” that is to say the birds, become confused with the male genitals, in the woman’s double entendre and in the priest’s own mind; he knows nothing of the missing dinner birds, thinking only of his own guilty genitals. The gender seems to be transferred from feminine to masculine, as the poultry becomes associated with the priest’s testicles, rather being associated with the wife’s sexual desire or fertility, as it was a few moments earlier. Food and sexual organs of both genders become interchangeable, as they are in the case of the nuts and eggs in *L’Esquiritel* (The Squirrel).

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<sup>27</sup> An analogy today would be food films that focus on the intersection between female or male sexual pleasure and the pleasure of food, for instance: *Como agua para chocolate/Like Water for Chocolate* (Alfonso Arau, 1992), in which the acts of women eating or cooking become sexualized, or the Franco-Italian *La Grande Bouffe* (Marco Ferreri 1973), in which a group of businessmen attempt to commit suicide by overeating at a gargantuan orgiastic ongoing feast with prostitutes, or *Shekvarebuli kulinaris ataserti retsepti/Chefin Love* (Nana Dzhordzhadze, 1996), in which cooking and seduction, eating and sexual pleasure are juxtaposed. For details on these films, see the Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com> (last accessed on March 31, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> This *fabliaux* deception recalls Boccaccio’s *salvamento* motif, in which a woman resorts to ruses to save herself from punishment and also as a mode of protection according to Rosanna Brusegan, “La fonction de la ruse dans les fabliaux,” *Strumenti Critici* 47–48 (1982): 148–61.

<sup>29</sup> Editor’s note: Perhaps this has to be read as an innuendo, in the sense as discussed by Siegfried Christoph in his contribution to this volume. Then it would mean that she believes that her husband is sexually not ‘sharp’ enough, hence needs to work on his ‘knife,’ whereas the priest is later implicated as having committed adultery with her. Otherwise he would not believe her so readily that the husband wants to cut off his penis when he pursues him with the knife.

<sup>30</sup> The nature of truth, deception, and lies in the *fabliaux* has been studied by Brent A. Pitts, “Truth-Seeking Discourse in the Old French Fabliaux,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 15 (1987): 95–117.

<sup>31</sup> Innuendo and double entendre are central to the *fabliaux* genre. Norris J. Lacy emphasizes the importance of language and word play, “whereas . . . the fabliaux are narratives about narration, it is also correct to conclude that, even before that, they are fundamentally language about language,” Norris J. Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York: Routledge, 1994), 95. See also Siegfried Christoph’s contribution to this volume.

The partridge is a sexual and moral symbol in the bestiaries of this period. First, through laying eggs, it is a symbol of fertility. Second, and more specifically, in Pierre de Beauvais's *Bestiaire*, written in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, the partridge is a diabolic and deceitful bird.<sup>32</sup> Based on a reference in a Biblical prophecy, Pierre's *Bestiaire* section on *De la pertris* explains that the female bird is dishonest and steals eggs from other nests, raises and leads the baby birds away as if they were her own. Here the female partridge is highly fertile and eggs may be fertilized by wind blowing from a male. Partridges are very sexual birds in the *bestiaries*, and male partridges also often engage in homosexual activity. The *bestiaire* and the *fabliaux* alike suggest that women, like the partridge, are deceitful robbers; furthermore, the female bird becomes the agent of the Devil, leading the flock away from good under the influence of evil; it also calls into question her fertility and the legitimacy of the children. Since essentially "you are what you eat," as the familiar Brillat-Savarin inspired adage goes, in the partridge fabliau, the woman who is eating the partridge is identified as sexual, deceitful, and privately self-indulgent.

Echoing the other food and animal imagery and innuendo common to these *fabliaux*, *La dame qui avoine demandoit pour Morel* (NRCF 108), presents a complex layering of sexual metaphors, as a personified hungry horse becomes a metaphor to describe the female body and its desires; they give the horse/vagina a name, Morel. Morel is constantly hungry for oats. The hunger of the horse functions as a metaphor for sexual desire and the oats it ingests as an image of semen entering the vagina, recalling the sexually suggestive grain harvest images discussed in Alexa Sand's chapter on manuscript miniatures in the present volume.

The husband shows that he can feed the horse with his wild oats, carrying the extended equestrian metaphor to its *fabliau*-logical conclusion. Grains such as oats, wheat, and barley, along with root vegetables and other plants had strong sexual associations in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The foods listed as having aphrodisiac powers in the late eleventh-century medical treatise the *Liber de Coitu* are: "Les végétaux, graines, . . . anis, ail des champs, carotte, . . . roquette, . . . radis, trèfle, navet, chanvre, ortie, etc. . . ." [vegetables, grains, anise bulb, wild garlic, carrot, roquette lettuce, radish, clover, turnip, hemp, nettle etc.].<sup>33</sup> Grains,

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<sup>32</sup> Bianciotto, Gabriel, ed. and trans, *Bestiaires du moyen âge* (Paris: Stock, 1980), 49–50. See also the introduction and English translation of Pierre de Beauvais, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: Pierre de Beauvais' Bestiary*, trans. Guy Mermier (Lewiston, NY, Queenston, Ontario, and Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen, 1992). For more on the connections between sin, sexuality, and animal behaviors with this and other animals in Pierre de Beauvais, the *Physiologus*, and other bestiaries, see Jeanette Beer, *Beasts of Love: Richard de Fournival's Bestiaire d'Amour and the Response* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> As discussed by Bruno Roy, "Trois regards sur les aphrodisiaques," *Du manuscrit à la table: Essais sur la cuisine au moyen âge et répertoire des manuscrits médiévaux contenant des recettes culinaires*, ed.

garlic, and roots such as turnip and radish are the most frequent of the vegetable (non-meat) foods to appear in comic sexual scenes in the *fabliaux*.

Grain is a common sexual euphemism in that period. Moreover, in a similar *fabliaux* representation of animals eating grain as sexual activity, in *Porcelet* [Piglet] (NRCF 67) the woman's genitalia are described as a hungry pig, and the male's semen, as wheat. The vagina is a pig rather than a horse, and the feed is wheat rather than oats, in this variation of the *Morel* story. All appears natural until the pig also partakes of "Bran," with the change in diet representing the adulterous change in sexual partner. In typical *fabliaux* degradation of women, the narrator depicts her vagina as a debauched glutton searching for more and different "grain." The title of this *fabliaux* highlights the image of genitalia are shown as organs or orifices that eat or chew, exhibiting the motif of the dangerous *vagina dentata* (to use the anthropological term for the symbol of the insatiately eating as E. Jane Burns has done).<sup>34</sup> If read as an instance of the *vagina dentata* motif, then the message of this narrative may be that the biting, chewing, and consuming suggested by female genitalia, described as a hungry animal, is to be feared by men as a means of castration or genital mutilation.

In Jean Bodel's *fabliau Les souhaits* [The Wish] (NRCF 105), in the context of the urban household of a married merchant couple, male sexual inadequacies are aggravated by dinner and drink. Sexual tensions and aggressions are played out around food in this household. Marital negotiations resemble business exchanges and center on the subjects of food and sex. The consumption of food and drink replaces, and in this particular case also prevents, sexual consummation. The husband drinks and eats in excess, celebrating after returning from a long absence and is rendered impotent by his inebriated and satiated state.<sup>35</sup>

The desperate housewife is disappointed with his debilitating gluttony, recalling the gender interplay surrounding impotence and arousal that Albrecht Classen describes in relation to the German tradition in his contribution to this volume ("Sexual Desire and Pornography"). Unlike the German wife who is able to fulfill her husband's desire, this *fabliau* wife's sexual frustration appears, if way may borrow the Freudian term here, sublimated in her dreams and fantasies of an annual market that sells only penises rather than food or goods; the penises are a sought-after commodity that she would purchase and consume. The market does not offer furs, linens, dyes, woods, or grains, we are told; only penises are for sale (ll. 71–80). Fantasies about multiple genitalia or dismembered genitalia abound in

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Carole Lambert (Paris and Montreal: Champion-Slatkine, 1992), 288.

<sup>34</sup> Burns, *Feminist Approaches*, 200–01.

<sup>35</sup> Drinking in excess is also commonly related to the sins of gluttony and lechery and is seen as diabolical in other Old French genres. See, for example, Adrian Tudor, "Hangovers from Hell: the Demon Drink in the First *Vie des Pères*," *Romance Studies* 29 (1997): 47–63.

the *fabliaux* corpus. For example, in *Les quatre sohaiis St. Martin*, one of the four wishes is that his wife has his body covered in dismembered *vits*, or 'penises' and that hers likewise be covered with female genitalia, with a subsequent wish being that all parts be removed and the literally over-sexed bodies restored to normal. There are many possible critical and humorous messages we may interpret in this mixture of food, castration, and cannibalism as she devours the dismembered penises, but this would take us too far afield for the purpose of this paper.<sup>36</sup>

To summarize the comic juxtaposition of food and sex in the *fabliaux*, it has been observed here that food is used as a tool to explore both social constructs and existing literary conventions surrounding sexuality. *Fabliaux* views on food and sex remain ambiguous in an ongoing discourse of male and female appetites. Rather than use food metaphors to conceal sexual references and details of sexual desires or behaviors (as would have been the case in prior troubadour lyric and romance for example), the *fabliaux* employ culinary images to associate gluttony with lechery and to amplify candid descriptions and exaggerate graphic portrayals of human sexuality. From flaccid sausages to moist partridge meat and fertile oatmeal, cooked food and raw sexuality go hand in hand in several *fabliaux*. In the meat-market of sexual and culinary exchanges in these narratives, the associations between genitals or bodily functions and specific foods in the *fabliaux* reveal much about the authors' perceptions of the human body, anatomy, and the nature of desire. Body parts are verbally dismembered and become humorously associated with food items.

Why are culino-erotic metaphors so frequent and so effective in the *fabliaux*? Because food is a human universal, food would be a familiar element that could be defamiliarized through comic excess or through comic juxtaposition with sex to express subversive anticlerical messages and other societal criticisms. Food is perhaps chosen over other objects to show comic links between the sins of lust and gluttony because in a time of food shortage, hunger, and religious fast rules, excess or surplus food could be viewed as a sinful sign of corruption or immorality. But such a purely religious reading would perhaps detract from the truly humorous,

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<sup>36</sup> In the *Lai d'Ignaure*, which has been designated arguably as part of the *fabliaux* corpus by some scholars, food becomes a critical or comic transgression of societal limits and the boundaries set by social mores, including castration and cannibalism, as sexualized men become meat once again. Dismembered or mutilated penises are again the topic in a tale that mixes consumption and copulation. Unfaithful women are supposed to eat a meal made from their dead lovers' genitals as punishment for their lust and adulterous indiscretion; this morbid meal is ironic and critical of female sexuality and infidelity. Cooking, sexuality, and justice become entangled here once again, this time in a comic context in a discussion of sex and cannibalism. For further analysis of this tale as well as analysis of Old French mock sermons and liturgical satire having to do with food or cannibalism, see Mark R. Burde, "Cannibals at Communion: The Poetics of Alimentary Desire in Four Medieval French Ecclesiastical Parodies, Circa 1200," doctoral dissertation, Washington University in St. Louis, 1997.



parodic, and satirical elements. Specific foods were often considered funny sexual symbols in the Middle Ages—but to some extent today as well—because of their analogous anatomical shapes, inviting textures, or supposed aphrodisiac qualities. In the *fabliaux*, the presence of food or kitchen objects in exaggerated scenes lends the opportunity for laughter and the occasion to extend boundaries of what is socially acceptable discourse of sexuality in this period. Ultimately, the forms of sexual culinary comedy explored here aim to combine the two human universals of sex and food to enhance the *fabliaux* dark comic world view of the human experience.

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## Sex and the Sacraments in *Tristan de Nanteuil*

The early fourteenth-century *chanson de geste*, *Tristan de Nanteuil*, features one of the most extraordinary episodes of sexual transformation in medieval French literature. The sex change takes place at almost exactly two thirds of the way into the complex plot of the poem.<sup>1</sup> The beautiful Saracen princess, Blanchandine, has been imprisoned in a tower in Ermenie by her father's guards after they find her with her lover Tristan. In prison, a fellow captive, the archbishop of Sens, baptizes Blanchandine and then marries her to Tristan. Blanchandine, disguised as a warrior knight, then escapes from prison to the Sultan of Babylon's camp where she encounters a Saracen princess named Clarinde (the sultan's daughter), who falls in love with "him" and promptly arranges their marriage.<sup>2</sup> However, frustrated when her marriage is not consummated, and informed by a spy of Blanchandine's deceit, Clarinde prepares a bath for her new husband to confirm her suspicions. Blanchandin, however, avoids public humiliation—and indeed the penalty of death—when a huge, wild stag rushes into the bath area, causing chaos and thereby facilitating Blanchandine's flight to the forest. There, an angel appears and offers to turn her into a man, which she accepts. The "miracle" is then described:

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<sup>1</sup> The poem is 23,361 alexandrines in length, and the description of the sexual transformation starts at v. 16, 196. *Tristan de Nanteuil; chanson de geste inédite*, ed. K[eth] V[al] Sinclair (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> This is a variation on the theme of the Christian knight falling in love with an enamored Saracen princess, which is commonplace in the Old French epic. The classic example comes from *La Prise d'Orange*, in which Orable falls in love with Guillaume Fierebrace. See Sharon Kinoshita, "The Politics of Courtly Love: *La Prise d'Orange* and the conversion of the Saracen Queen," *Romanic Review*, 86, 2 (1995): 265–87; Charles A. Knudson, "Le thème de la princesse sarrasine dans *La Prise d'Orange*," *Romance Philology*, 22 (1969): 449–62; and more generally, Lynn Tarte Ramey, "Role Models? Saracen Women in Medieval French Epic," *Romance Notes*, 41, 2 (2001): 131–41. See also Albrecht Classen, "Confrontation with the Foreign World of the East: Saracen Princesses in Medieval German Narratives," *Orbis Litterarum* 53 (1998): 277–95.

Nouvelle char lui vint, en aultre se mua  
 Et devvint ung vrais homs, car Dieu lui envoya  
 Toute nature de home tant que besoing en a  
 En maniere d'un home et tout lui ottroya,  
 Mais oncques son semblant qu'ot devant ne changa.  
 La fut homs Blanchandine et sy endroit faurra  
 Le non de Blanchandine, car appellés sera  
 Blanchandins d'ores mes car bien appertendra.  
 Quant se vit transmué, Jhesus Crist en loa.<sup>3</sup> (vv. 16196–204)

[New flesh came to him, she changed into another  
 And became a real man, for God sent to her  
 Everything of a manly nature which she needs  
 To be a man and he granted her everything,  
 But did not change her appearance which she had before.  
 There was the man Blanchandine and from now on  
 The name Blanchandine will not be used because she will be called  
 Blanchandin henceforth because [this name] belongs to him.  
 When she saw herself transformed, she praised Jesus Christ.]

Equipped with a new name and a new sexual organ (“membre”) which is “gros et quarré” (“big and thick”), “Blanchandin” sacrifices the stag as commanded by the angel and returns to the court where, unafraid to reveal his naked body, he jumps into the bath:

Blanchandins se desvest, ne s'y est arrestés,  
 Et quant il fut tout nuz, vers la cuve est allés,  
 Devant mainte pucelle est nuz dedens entrés.  
 La lui paroît le membre qu'estoit gros et quarrés;  
 Que bien le vit Clarinde—bien estoit figurés—  
 Dont ne feust aussy lye pour .xxx. royautés. (vv. 16354–59)

[Blanchandin undressed, he didn't hesitate,  
 And when he was completely naked, he went to the tub,  
 In front of many young maidens he got into it naked.  
 There appeared to her the member which was big and thick;  
 And Clarinde saw it clearly—it was well formed—  
 She could not have been so happy if she had been given thirty  
 kingdoms.]

Delighted by this turn of events, Clarinde is subsequently baptized into the Christian faith, converts thousands of other Saracens, and through Blanchandin, gives birth to a boy who becomes the celebrated St. Gilles.

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<sup>3</sup> All translations from the Old French are my own.

Not surprisingly, the Blanchandine/Clarinde episode in *Tristan de Nanteuil* has generated interest recently from scholars focusing on its representation of medieval sexuality. Thus, Michèle Perret, writing about a group of four texts which includes *Tristan de Nanteuil*, observes that the poem questions sexual polarization and proposes “une remise en question du clivage sexuel, une représentation plus nuancée de la différence des sexes, une interrogation, enfin, sur la nature de l’autre: la femme” (“a re-examination of the sexual divide, a more nuanced representation of the difference between the sexes, a questioning, in the final analysis, of the nature of the other: woman.”)<sup>4</sup> She specifically emphasizes the role of language and its relation to authority in the construction of gender. Francesca Canadé Sautman, on the other hand, in her queering of the poem, reads same sex desire into the relationship between Blanchandin and Clarinde, and underlines the ambiguity of the sex change scene.<sup>5</sup> Without questioning that *Tristan de Nanteuil* examines the relationships between gender, sex, language, and societal norms, as these critics maintain, I believe that much of the meaning and significance of this episode for medieval audiences is lost if we do not take into account *Tristan de Nanteuil*’s engagement with contemporary religious discourse and the institutions which sponsored both that discourse and the poem itself. In focusing the discussion of cross-dressing and the sex change in the poem too narrowly on issues of gender construction and same sex desire, modern criticism inappropriately impoverishes the textual, cultural, and performative context of the episode, which is rich in religious allusion.

In what follows, I wish to explore the poem’s fascinating intersection of sexuality and contemporary religion. I argue that the Blanchandin/Clarinde episode is as much about religious transformation as about a change of sexual identity, and that this aspect of the poem would have been appreciated by the original audience. The identity and specific whereabouts of that audience remains an open question; however, recent studies indicate the close relationship between the *chansons de geste*—and indeed the jongleurs responsible for presenting them—and religious institutions, namely monastic houses, churches, and lay confraternities.<sup>6</sup> In this

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<sup>4</sup> Michèle Perret, “Travesties et transsexuelles: Yde, Silence, Grisandole, Blanchandine,” *Romance Notes*, 25, 3 (1985): 328–40; here 329.

<sup>5</sup> Francesca Canadé Sautman, “What Can They Possibly Do Together? Queer Epic Performances in *Tristan de Nanteuil*,” *Same Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 199–232.

<sup>6</sup> On the ownership of vernacular manuscripts by ecclesiastical and monastic houses, see Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*. 2 Vols. *Faux Titre*: 221–22 (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2002), II, 737–60; and Andrew Taylor, *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers*. Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 26–75. On associations between the *chansons de geste* and confraternities, see Carol Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras*. Conjunctions of

paper I want to pursue that line of research further, as well as to address the question of how this poem's strange mixture of the sacred and profane impacted its original audience.<sup>7</sup>

### The Historical and Narrative Contexts of *Tristan de Nanteuil*

But first, some background to the poem in general and the Blanchandine/Clarinde episode in particular. *Tristan de Nanteuil* dates from the first half of the fourteenth century, and is extant in a single, fifteenth-century paper manuscript.<sup>8</sup> The poem belongs to the cycle of *chansons de geste* known as the "la geste de Nanteuil."<sup>9</sup> It also has associations with *Macaire* and *Huon de Bordeaux*, which are from the king's cycle.<sup>10</sup> Keith Sinclair, identifies the dialectal features of the poem as Franco-Picard with Walloon characteristics.<sup>11</sup> This situates the poem intriguingly in the same geographical area as the fourteenth-century *Yde et Olive*, the fourteenth-century *Baudouin de Sebourc*, and the thirteenth-century *Roman de Silence*, all of which interrogate gender constructions.<sup>12</sup>

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Religion and Power in the Medieval Past (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 38–39, 41, 110–11; and Jean-Guy Gouttebroze, "À l'origine du culte du Précieux Sang de Fécamp, le Saint Voulte de Lucques," *Tabularia: Sources écrites de la Normandie médiévale* 2 (2002): 1–8; for a discussion of all of these religious associations with the *chansons de geste*, see the first two chapters of my book *Reception and Memory: A Cognitive Approach to the Chansons de geste*, Faux Titre (Rodopi, forthcoming); and Paula Leverage, "The Reception of the *Chansons de geste*," *Olifant: A Publication of the Société Rencesvals North American Branch*, Special issue, ed. Anne Berthelot, and in *Epic Studies: Acts of the Storrs Conference. Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the International Rencesvals Society* (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> A recent book by Maria Dobozy, *Re-Membering the Present: The Medieval German Poet-Minstral in Cultural Context*. Disputatio 6 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005) addresses issues of performance and morality in medieval Germany, using performance theory to discuss the complex relationship between the minstrels and the clergy who were under "the temptation to minstrelize the liturgy" (130), 85–142.

<sup>8</sup> *Tristan de Nanteuil; chanson de geste inédite*. In the introduction to this edition, the poem's editor, Keith Val Sinclair, states that the hand of copyist, which he dates to 1473–1476, does not seem to be later than the *terminus a quo* of the filigranes of the paper.

<sup>9</sup> See Keith Val Sinclair, "The Cyclic Relationships of *Tristan de Nanteuil*," *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, 21 (1964): 27–38.

<sup>10</sup> *Macaire: chanson de geste publiée d'après le manuscrit unique de Venise, avec un essai de restitution en regard*, ed. François Guessard (A. Franck: Paris, 1866; rpt. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1966); *Huon de Bordeaux*, ed. Pierre Ruelle. Université libre, Bruxelles. Travaux de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres, 20. (Bruxelles: Presses universitaires de Bruxelles, 1960).

<sup>11</sup> *Tristan de Nanteuil; chanson de geste inédite*, Introduction; and "Notes on the Vocabulary of *Tristan de Nanteuil*" *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 78 (1962): 452–63.

<sup>12</sup> Francesca Canadé Sautman, "What Can They Possibly Do Together?," 205–08; see also Sinclair, "Notes on the Vocabulary of *Tristan de Nanteuil*," *Esclarmonde, Clarisse et Florent, Yde et Olive*. Drei Fortsetzungen der chanson von Huon de Bordeaux, nach der einzigen Turiner Handschrift, ed.

At a length of over 23,000 alexandrines, the poem is long and complicated. The main character, Tristan, is not the Tristan of the Béroul and Thomas legends but has been named for the sad circumstances of his birth at sea in a storm. First saved by a mermaid who nurses him, he is then raised by a giant female deer in a forest where an angel teaches him languages, and where he must remain for sixteen years before becoming a knight. The deer nurses Tristan and at the same time engages in aggressive killing of Saracens. In the forest, while still hairy and wild, the young man meets the pagan Blanchandine, courts her with a distinct lack of ceremony, and engenders a child who is named Raimon for the branch or “ramée” under which he is discovered by Tristan’s mother, Aye d’Avignon. Blanchandine is re-discovered by her father’s men and locked in a tower. As he searches for her, Tristan meets his half brother Doon. When Tristan learns that Blanchandine’s father, Galafre, has been kidnapped, he advises Tristan to try and save him. Ultimately it is Doon, pretending to be Tristan, who rescues Galafre, since Tristan is somewhat of a coward. Galafre is so grateful that he gives his daughter to Tristan. After a series of adventures which result in the imprisonment of Tristan and Blanchandine, they are married, and Blanchandine baptized, in prison, by an archbishop. As we have seen in the introduction, Blanchandine’s escape, in male disguise, leads to her marriage with Clarinde, and ultimately to the episode of the sex change which is under discussion here.

The sex change scene distinguishes *Tristan de Nanteuil* from narratives of transvestism, such as the story of Silence who is raised as a boy by her parents so that she can inherit, or the wife of the knight in the fabliau *Berengier au long cul* (Berengier with the long arse), who dresses as the knight Berengier to humiliate her timorous husband who prefers to kiss her / his backside than fight against her / him.<sup>13</sup> In German literature, the tale of “The Belt” (“Der Borte”) by Dietrich von der Gletze, from the second half of the thirteenth century, also features a married couple, divided as a result of the wife’s infidelity, and once again, it is the woman who disguises herself as a man to dupe her husband, in this instance manipulating him to fall in love with her in drag.<sup>14</sup> These narratives usually conclude with a

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Max Schwiegel (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1889); *Baudouin de Sebourc*, ed. Larry S. Crist and Robert Francis Cook. 2 vols. Publications de la Société des anciens textes français (Abbeville: F. Paillart, 2002); *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, ed. and trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992). On *Yde et Olive*, see Robert L.A. Clark, “A Heroine’s Sexual Itinerary: Incest, Transvestism, and Same-Sex Marriage in *Yde et Olive*,” *Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Boundary in Old French Literature*, ed. Karen J. Taylor. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 2064 (New York: Garland, 1998), 89–105.

<sup>13</sup> *Nouveau Recueil complet des fabliaux*, ed. Willem Noomen and Nico van den Boogaard. 10 Vols. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1983–1998); vol 4, 247–77.

<sup>14</sup> *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*, sel. and trans. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 328; MRTS Texts for Teaching, 3 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 19–28.

return to heteronormative patterns. In medieval French literature *Tristan* is one of two works in which a physical sex change occurs, the other being *Yde et Olive* mentioned previously.

### Secular and Sacred Sources

The elements of *Tristan's* narrative constitute an intriguing mix drawn from well-known secular and sacred sources. Stories from antiquity and medieval folklore offered numerous variations on the change-of-sex motif, as scholars have duly noted.<sup>15</sup> In an article from 1935, the folklorist Alexander Haggerty Krappe drew parallels between *Tristan* and the Ovidian tale of Iphis, who is raised as a boy, and then physically transformed miraculously in the temple of Isis before her wedding.<sup>16</sup> He dismisses a direct influence from Ovid, and cites two Indian epics, the *Mahâbhârata* and the *Panchakhyâna-vârttika*, which have striking similarities to *Tristan de Nanteuil*. The second, in particular, is especially interesting since it includes a bath scene used as a test of sex, a tiger which disrupts the test, and a second magical bath belonging to a Devi, which transforms the young girl into a man.<sup>17</sup> Krappe was puzzled by the narrative substitution of a deer for a tiger, but of course deer were indigenous to western Europe, whereas tigers were not.<sup>18</sup> Another intercultural adjustment was the substitution of the Christian God, assisted by an angel, in place of the Indian Devi, as the intervening deity who brings about the sexual transformation.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting the stress on divine sanction for the sex change; it is not, in other words, the result of "magic" or another secularized *deus ex machina*.

As Sautman observes, the deer is "a locus of complex symbolic articulation" both in the Blanchandine/Clarinde episode and throughout *Tristan de Nanteuil*. She notes that, as the "horned one," he is the spurious, cuckolded weak male, but she further suggests his connection with "renewal, rebirth, and regeneration."<sup>20</sup> This last point, however, she does not pursue, though I believe it is especially important in an episode in which Christian ideas associated with renewal—baptism, penitence, sacrifice—are invoked.

<sup>15</sup> Sautman in "What Can They Possibly Do Together?" refers to the Aarne-Thompson classification of folk tale types, identifying specifically form type 514, "The Shift of Sex," 209.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Haggerty Krappe, "*Tristan de Nanteuil*" *Romania* 61 (1935): 55–71; here 67.

<sup>17</sup> Krappe, "*Tristan de Nanteuil*"; here 68–69.

<sup>18</sup> Krappe, "*Tristan de Nanteuil*"; here 70; this point is observed by Keith Val Sinclair in his book *Tristan de Nanteuil: Thematic Infrastructure and Literary Creation*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie, 195 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1983), 102–03.

<sup>19</sup> Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil: Thematic Infrastructure*, 102–03.

<sup>20</sup> Sautman, "What Can They Possibly Do Together?" 208.

In Christian iconography and Biblical exegesis, the deer is associated closely with the sacrament of baptism and the personhood of Christ. Exegetically, the key Biblical passage concerning baptism is the psalmist's saying, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, / So pants my soul for you, O God" (Psalm 42:2). In early Christian Rome, catechumens walked in procession to the baptistery singing these verses, and well into the Middle Ages baptisteries were decorated with deer drinking from the water of life.<sup>21</sup> Baptisteries, it is worth adding, were buildings constructed separate from church sanctuaries in the Middle Ages because they were required to house baths for the full immersion of the penitent's body, which remained the most common method of baptizing through at least the early thirteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

For contemporary readers and listeners of *Tristan de Nanteuil*, therefore, baths would have been invoked or visualized not only for the two momentous scenes testing Blanchandine's sexual identity, but also near the beginning and the ending of the episode when Blanchandine and Clarinde are baptized by a bishop respectively to confirm their Christian identity. Indeed, baptism, itself a form of spiritual transformation which signifies conversion to Christianity, is a recurring motif. Blanchandine is baptized in prison by a bishop before her escape; when proposed to by Clarinde, she refuses marriage until the former is baptized; she then refuses to consummate the marriage (impossible at that point, of course) until Clarinde is baptized; and it is only when the Saracen Queen is baptized as a Christian—after the sex change—that physical fulfillment occurs and subsequently produces a son and heir. It is also noteworthy that at the beginning of the episode, all of the major human characters are pagan, by its end they are Christian, confirmed through public baptism. Thus, we read of Clarinde and her fellow Saracens:

Et Clarinde la belle dont vous oÿ avés,  
Fist son corps baptiser evesques honorés;  
Par devant tout le peuple fut il la baptisés,

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<sup>21</sup> Joan Barclay Lloyd, "A New Look at the Mosaics of San Clemente," *Omnia Disce: Medieval Studies in Memory of Leonard Boyle, O.P.*, ed. Anne J. Duggan, Joan Greatrex, and Brenda Bolton. Church, Faith, and Culture in the Medieval West (Aldershot, Hants, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate; 2004), 9–28; here 21–22.

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century wrote about baptism by immersion—rather than sprinkling—as the common custom of the time. *A Catholic Dictionary, containing some account of the doctrine, discipline, rites, ceremonies, councils and religious orders of the Catholic Church*. William E. Addis and Thomas Arnold. 12th edition. (London: Kegan Paul, 1934). It was not until 1311 that the Catholic Church, via the Council of Ravenna, legalized baptism by sprinkling, leaving it thereafter up to the officiating priest. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Academic Edition. <http://search.eb.com>.



Et commanda la dame, s'en fut le bans criés,  
Que chascun se baptise environ de tous lez. (vv. 16373–77)

[And Clarinde the beautiful of whom you have heard,  
Was baptized by a noble bishop;  
In front of everyone she was baptized,  
And the lady ordered by a decree that was broadcast  
That everyone from all around should be baptized.]

In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, the transformation of spiritual identity through baptism is directly linked to Blanchandine's transformation of sexual identity. Clarinde's baptism is a public affair, just as the bath for Blanchandin, who is said to enter it "devant mainte pucelle;" v. 16356; "in front of many maidens." The literal meaning of the Old French phrase "fist son corps baptiser" (16374; "had her person / body baptized") is richer in nuances than the acceptable English translation ("was baptized") permits. The double meaning of "corps" in Old French, which can mean "body" or "person," sets up a resonance with Blanchandin's sex change, which, like Clarinde's baptism, is associated with water. It is also significant that "corps" is masculine so that the phrase "fist son corps baptiser," which is clearly associated with "Clarinde la belle," gives way to "devant tout le peuple fut il la baptisés" (literally: in front of everyone, he / it (le corps) was baptized) in verse 16375 where a masculine pronoun (through association with "corps") refers to Clarinde. Clarinde's baptism transforms her spiritually, as Blanchandin has been transformed bodily. One of the important aspects of baptism, which is relevant to reading the sex change in conjunction with the baptism, and which will be observed in the life of Saint Eustachius (see below), is the assuming of a new name to mark the change. Blanchandine, following the miraculous transformation, identifies "himself" truly now as Blanchandin.

I wish to return next to the wild deer which, if associated with baptism, also has a long patristic history in Christian hagiographical writings with spiritual nourishment, and more specifically with Christ. In *Tristan de Nanteuil*, this is illustrated by way of St. Gilles, the great holy man born to Clarinde and Blanchandin, shortly after her baptism. For as Jacobus de Voragine recounts in the *Legenda aurea* (and *Tristan de Nanteuil* relates the story as well), when St. Gilles retreats in solitude to the desert as an adult, he is nurtured with the milk of a female deer, who invariably appears in iconic portraits of the saint.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*. Jacobus de Voragine. Trans. William Granger Ryan. 2 Vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), "Saint Giles," II, 147–49. "There was also a doe ready to hand, and she came at certain hours and nourished him with her milk," II, 147. On the iconography of Saint Gilles (also known as Aegidius in Latin), see Engelbert Kirschbaum and Günter Bandmann *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*. 8 vols. (Rome: Herder, 1968–1976), V, 51–54.

This recalls an earlier episode in *Tristan* when the epic's namesake also survives from the milk of a deer, but one whose monstrous size and strength are comparable to the wild stag who figures so significantly in the Blanchandin/Clarinde story. Both these stags are evocative of yet another hagiographical account featuring the deer, the life of Saint Eustachius, as Keith Sinclair observes.<sup>24</sup> Eustachius is an amalgam of St. Paul and Job. He starts out in life as Placidius, a Roman soldier living a despicable life with his wife. However, one day while hunting he follows a hart up to a high rock, at which point he "saw between its antlers what looked like the holy cross, shining more brightly than the sun" and heard the deer speak to him saying, "For your sake I have appeared to you in this animal. I am the Christ, whom you worship without knowing it" and exhorting him to be baptized along with his family.<sup>25</sup> After Eustachius's first vision, he returns the following day to the same site and prays. God's reply is as follows: "Blessed are you, Eustace, for accepting the bath of my grace, because now you have overcome the devil! Now you have trampled on the one who had deceived you! Now your faith will be seen!"<sup>26</sup> Here the words of Christ render apparent the parallel between washing and baptism. The hart or deer as a symbol of Christ was widespread in the Middle Ages, affiliated with Saint Procopious and St. Hebert, along with St. Eustace and St. Gilles, and is traceable to the Song of Songs in which Biblical exegesis identified Christ with the lover who is a "leaping on the mountains, bounding over the hills. [...] like a gazelle, like a young stag" (Song 2: 8–9, and 2: 17).

In the Blanchandine/Clarinde episode of *Tristan de Nanteuil*, the stag's role is somewhat mysterious. The poet could have found a precedent for the stag's interruption of the trial by bath from Indian folklore (where a tiger is featured), but the French epic goes out of its way in describing this saving of the Christian heroine from humiliation and subsequent death by pagans as an act of divine intervention ("Par le vouloir de Dieu qui le va conduisant;" v. 15757; "Through the will of God which keeps guiding him.") Imagery associated with Christ Himself begins to occur in the forest where the stag protects and leads Blanchandine away from her Saracen enemies, where the heroine's own sufferings invoke the Passion, and where the creature's sacrificial death appears necessary for Blanchandine's transformation to take place.

Blanchandine's painful passage through the forest is described as a sort of way of the Cross, in both its contents and rhythm, through which she suffers Christ's Passion. As she makes her way through the thorny forest, she falls many times,

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<sup>24</sup> Sinclair, *Tristan de Nanteuil: Thematic Infrastructure*, 1–8.

<sup>25</sup> *The Golden Legend*, "Saint Eustace," II, 266–71; here 266–67. Saint Eustachius, like Saint Gilles, is also frequently depicted with a stag. See *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, VI, 194–99.

<sup>26</sup> *The Golden Legend*, "Saint Eustace," II, 267.

prays, continues, falls again or is injured, and gets back up. Her prayers are to “Dieu et sa croix,” her foot is pierced right through by a thorn, blood pours down her head, and she prays to God to send her suffering to endure in Tristan’s name:

Et dit: “Dieu, je t’aoure et te graci granment  
De quanques que m’envoyes; mon corps en gré le prent.  
**Je veul ou non de toy endurer le tourment** [my emphasis]  
En l’onneur de Tristan et de son sauvement.  
La penance qu’aray a fere longuement,  
Je le fais en son non, . . . . (vv. 16089–94)

[And she said, “God, I adore you and thank you greatly  
For whatever you send me; my body takes it gratefully.  
**I want to endure the torment in your name**  
In honor of Tristan and his salvation / rescue.  
The penance which I shall have to do for a long time,  
I do it in his name.]

Just before the stag prostrates itself before her, we are told that Blanchandine honored Jesus Christ: “De toutes ses griefftés Jhesus Crist aoura” (v. 16124; “She honored him for all his sufferings”). This verse is significant because it refers to the suffering of Christ’s Passion as “les griefftés.” It occurs again, after the sex change, and immediately after Clarinde’s baptism in reference to Blanchandin’s experiences:

Aiglentine encontra qui lui dist: “Sa venés.  
Esse vrai que vous estes ungs homs tout figurés?  
Le bastart le m’a dit, ne sçay c’est verités.  
– Oÿ, dist Blanchandins, sy voir que Dieu fut nés.”  
Dont lui conta commant il senti les greftés. (vv. 16385–89)

[Aiglentine came towards him and said to him: Come here.  
Is it true that you are a man, completely formed?  
The bastard told me, I don’t know if it’s true.  
Yes, said Blanchandin, it’s as true as God was born.  
Then he related to her how he felt the sufferings.]

In this instance, the use of the definite article “les” indicates that Blanchandin has endured not just sufferings, but **the** sufferings, or in other words, the sufferings of the Passion. However, even without the definite article, the text has already glossed “greftés” as Christ’s Passion, as we have already seen. Since Blanchandin’s statement comes after the sex change, we might ask to what is he referring? Which “greftés,” which Passion does he have in mind, or is he referring both to the suffering in the forest, and the subsequent sex change? Since his answer is given in response to his mother querying his new sex, we can assume that he is including the sex change in his account of his sufferings.

This makes for a fascinating conjunction of Christ's Passion with a woman changing sex and bodily becoming a man. *Tristan de Nanteuil*, thus, seems to engage with the sacrament of the eucharist, as well as baptism, in its narrative of sexual transformation. Strange as it may at first appear, it is an illuminating comparison. The theological concept of transubstantiation through which bread becomes flesh and wine becomes blood is served very well through a comparison of a woman bodily becoming a man. Between the ninth and twelfth centuries, theologians had debated the appropriateness of various metaphors for the transubstantiation, while later, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the fascination with the doctrine is evident in the proliferation of eucharistic miracles during which Christ was seen to appear in the priest's hands.<sup>27</sup> From eucharistic devotion developed a strong sense of the importance of *imitatio Christi*, which should be understood as becoming or being. Through consuming the body and blood of Christ, which represented the crucified body of Christ, the devout *became* the crucified Christ.<sup>28</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum has described the somatic bodily transformations of women mystics who in eating the eucharist became the flesh and blood of the male Christ.<sup>29</sup> The sex change of Blanchandine who becomes physically male after suffering the literal hardships of the Passion in the forest, suggests the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into flesh and blood, but also, significantly, the change which occurs in the faithful who consume the eucharist.

The question that now arises is how contemporary audiences viewed the poem's odd blending of the pious with the erotic, its sophisticated—not to say daring—treatment of the most sacred teachings of the church in terms of romantic narrative, and, at the same time, the depiction of transgressive sexual desire and at least one raunchy scene featuring the heroine's "shameless flaunting of the new-found member,"<sup>30</sup> worth repeating here to reaffirm the point:

Blanchandins se desvest, ne s'y est arrestés,  
Et quant il fut tout nuz, vers la cuve est allés,  
Devant mainte pucelle est nuz dedens entrés.  
La lui paroit le membre qu'estoit gros et quarrés;  
Que bien le vit Clarinde—bien estoit figurés—  
Dont ne feust aussy lye pour .xxx. royaultés. (vv. 16354–59)

<sup>27</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, *The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 50–51.

<sup>28</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 256–57.

<sup>29</sup> *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 274–75.

<sup>30</sup> Sautman's phrasing, "What Can They Possibly Do Together," here 218.

[Blanchandin undressed, he didn't hesitate,  
 And when he was completely naked, he went to the tub,  
 In front of many young maidens he got into it naked.  
 There appeared to her the member which was big and thick;  
 And Clarinde saw it clearly—it was quite formed—  
 She could not have been so happy if she had been given thirty  
 kingdoms.]

That the Blanchandine/Clarinde episode opens up a space for homoerotic desire has been argued by Francesca Canadé Sautman, particularly in moments such as Clarinde's lament after her beloved's escape to the forest:

Car la beauté de lui le scien ceur enlumine.  
 "Aÿ! dist elle, amis, que vostre beaulté fine  
 M'embrase nuyt et jour d'amoureuse doctrine!  
 Car n'a sy bel de vous jusques a la marine."  
 .....  
 Adès vise Clarinde se revenir verroit  
 Blanchandine la belle que forment desiroit. (vv. 15897–908)  
 [for the beauty of him illuminates her heart,  
 Ah, she says, friend, how your fine beauty  
 Sets me on fire night and day with the doctrine of love  
 For there is no [man] as handsome as you from here to the sea  
 .....  
 And then Clarinde looked to see if Blanchandine was returning  
 The beautiful [woman/maid] whom she so strongly desired.]

One might add that some members of the Church hierarchy could not have been happy about the depiction of crossdressing in poetry or drama, particularly in narratives featuring romantic love. And this may well explain, in part, the hostility of many clergymen toward both the *chanson de geste* and their performing jongleurs. From the early days of the Church, Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine and others had condemned transvestism as an abomination, citing Deuteronomy as its prooftext.<sup>31</sup> Many of course tolerated it on the stage for practical reasons—better for men to impersonate women in plays than for females to incite the lust of spectators by mounting the stage themselves. However, for women to crossdress as men was especially reprehensible.

The poem's strange conjunction of the sacred and profane raises other questions. What kind of audience would have appreciated this sort of poem? Is the treatment of religious doctrine and practice "serious"? Is the poem, on some level, parodying religious ideas? Even if it is, can we regard it as "subversive"? Why would the

<sup>31</sup> Deuteronomy 22:5: "The woman shall not wear that which pertains to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment."

sexual topic play such a great role here? And could we really accept subtle homoerotic allusions?

Because so little has survived by way of reader response commentary or eyewitness accounts of medieval poems recited or sung in performance, it is difficult to find clear answers to these questions. However, recent work on the institutional background to the *chansons de geste*, and particularly on the jongleurs who reportedly performed them, might lead to some answers, however conjecturally framed.

Two critical developments in recent years have changed the way scholars think about the *chansons de geste* and their audiences. One relates to the poetry itself, which recognizes it to be far more sophisticated than earlier scholars assumed: that the poems were written not before, but contemporaneous with, early French romances, and that their artistry is of generally high quality.<sup>32</sup> Most scholars, in other words, no longer accept the theory that the *chansons de geste*, for the most part, are the product of oral transmission, disseminated by way of memory by traveling jongleurs.

The second development, a much more recent one and of particular relevance to the discussion at hand, relates to the institutional conditions within which the poetry was produced, performed, and made available for a reading audience. Particularly important is the connection of the *chansons de geste* to the Church and the lay and religious organizations connected with them. This vein of research has been devalued in the past, primarily due to the persisting perception of "secular poetry" as either cordoned off from the interests of the church or in direct opposition to it.

Thanks to the recent work of Keith Busby, Andrew Taylor and Christopher Page, among other scholars, it is now clear that abbeys, monasteries, and other religious houses, not only played an important role in producing and preserving old French epics like the Oxford *Roland*, but that they also constituted an important audience for those poems.<sup>33</sup> Since such institutions often had close ties to the lay communities in which they were situated, they no doubt also sponsored

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<sup>32</sup> Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Edward A. Heinemann, *L'Art métrique de la chanson de geste: Essai sur la musicalité du récit* (Geneva: Droz, 1993).

<sup>33</sup> See references to work by Keith Busby, Andrew Taylor, Carol Symes, Jean-Guy Gouttebrouze and the author in footnote 6, and Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France 1100–1300*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). More generally, on the close relationship of the sacred and the secular in medieval literature, see *Geistliches in weltlicher und Weltliches in geistlicher Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. Christoph Huber, Burghart Wachinger, Hans-Joachim Ziegeler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000). See also the contribution to this volume by Eva Parra Membrives, "Lust ohne Liebe: Roswitha von Gandersheim und geschlechtsspezifische Strafen für sündigen Sex."

performances of *chansons de geste* by jongleurs or made the poems available for reading.

And an even more intriguing development has been research on lay confraternities of jongleurs in northern France.<sup>34</sup> These were not trade guilds but religious societies. Thus, while protecting professional interests may have factored into their formation, they were founded chiefly on religious grounds, to honor a saint or holy event, for example, and to carry out a range of religious activities such as funding masses for their own dead members, raising alms for the poor, building chapels, and so on. They walked together in procession on major feast days several times a year, attended funerals of their own regularly, and arranged other meetings. This does not support the time-honored image of the jongleur as a traveling entertainer who lived from one performance to another, nor does it quite mesh with the privileged musician or poet patronaged by royal and aristocratic households.

Clearly, many jongleurs fit these common perceptions, and indeed the church's hostility is explained by the itinerant lifestyle of jongleurs. Nevertheless across the neighboring, north-eastern provinces of Artois, Picardy and Normandy, in close proximity to Valenciennes in the French Hainaut, where scholars generally place *Tristan de Nanteuil*,<sup>35</sup> we can identify four major confraternities of jongleurs who meet the description I have just given. The closest was the jongleurs' *Carité* at Arras, about fifty miles west of Valenciennes, while another was located further west in Picardy, at about eighty miles' distance in Amiens. Another existed at Beauvais, located north of Paris, and finally jongleurs formed a confraternity linked to the Benedictine Abbey at Fécamp, on the Normandy coast. The confraternity at Fécamp was the oldest, established in the eleventh century under the protection of St. Martin and associated with the Benedictine monastery of Holy Trinity, which was famous for its relics of the Precious Blood.<sup>36</sup> The thirteenth-century poem of *Saint Voult de Lucques* in the vernacular, which is linguistically compatible with the area of Fécamp, is written in decasyllabic, assonanced *laisses*, and in its style resembles the *chanson de geste*.<sup>37</sup> Among the most famous members of the jongleurs' *Carité* at Arras in the early thirteenth century was Jehan Bodel,

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<sup>34</sup> Maria Dobozy, in *Re-Membering the Present*, contests the claim that performers established themselves in society through confraternities. She discusses the case of the confraternity in Vienna, which was the first German city to have a brotherhood, 181–95.

<sup>35</sup> Keith Val Sinclair, "Murder in the Forest of Mormal and *Tristan de Nanteuil*," *Romance Notes* 4, 2 (1963): 161–65; Keith Val Sinclair, "Notes on the Vocabulary of *Tristan de Nanteuil*" *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 78 (1962): 452–63; Sautman, "What Can They Possibly Do Together?" 205–08.

<sup>36</sup> Jean-Guy Gouttebroze, "A l'origine du culte du Précieux Sang de Fécamp, le *Saint Voult de Lucques*," *Tabularia: Sources écrites de la Normandie médiévale* 2 (2002): 1–8.

<sup>37</sup> *Le Saint Vou de Luques, altfranzösisches Gedicht des XIII. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Wendelin Foerster (Erlangen: F. Junge, 1906).

author of the *Chanson des Saisnes*. As Carol Symes has very recently shown, the powerful confraternity of jongleurs at Arras, with their founding legend of a miraculous candle given to them by the Blessed Virgin, built a magnificent chapel in honor of their saint and included forty-eight monks from the local Abbey of Saint-Vaast among their affiliates.<sup>38</sup>

The confraternities give us some of our most concrete information about the public reading of the *chanson de geste* before both lay and religious audiences. Between 1376 and 1564, jongleurs evidently performed *chansons de geste* to the monks of Beauvais at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost before the high mass. The statutes of the fief of the confraternity of jongleurs of Beauvais from 1376 state that the proprietor of the fief will be charged with the expenses of jongleurs performing *chansons de geste* on high feastdays.<sup>39</sup> It is significant that in this case the *chansons de geste* were not performed in the church as part of the liturgy, but in the cloister of the monastery. In the cloister, the monks interacted with lay people from the community for business purposes, but they worked and prayed there too.<sup>40</sup> The alignment of the jongleurs' performances with high feastdays suggests that the jongleurs would have acquired a heightened awareness of the liturgical calendar through the practical ways in which it determined their lives. One might expect that such practical intimacy with the liturgical calendar would manifest itself in the *chansons de geste*, and this is indeed the case. As I have described elsewhere, in *Girart de Roussillon* narrative events are aligned with the liturgical calendar, such that Girart's return from exile occurs on Easter Sunday.<sup>41</sup>

Like Jehan Bodel at Arras, the poet of *Tristan de Nanteuil*, as I would like to suggest, may well have operated within the confines of a jongleurs' confraternity. We have no surviving record of one in the Valenciennes area from that time period, but the poem's sophisticated treatment of theological issues would have been understood and appreciated by such an audience. Given the multiplicity of venues and events, including plays, sponsored by Bodel's jongleurs' in Arras,

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<sup>38</sup> Carol Symes, *A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 38–39, 41, 110–11.

<sup>39</sup> Edmond Faral, *Les Jongleurs en France au moyen âge* (1910; Paris: H. Champion, 1971), 45.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 272. In seeking to explain the source of the quadrangular shape of the cloister, first codified in the "The Plan of St. Gall," Walter Horn in his article "The Origins of the Medieval Cloister," *Gesta* 12 (1973): 13–52; here 37–48, has emphasized the role of economics as the Benedictines became involved with the new agrarian feudalism which brought increasingly more lay people from the community into the monasteries. For further information on "The Plan of St. Gall," see Walter Horn's book *The Plan of St. Gall: A Study of the Architecture and Economy of and Life in a Paradigmatic Carolingian Monastery*. 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>41</sup> Paula Leverage, "Reading Hagiography in an Epic: The Liturgical Calendar in *Girart de Roussillon*," *Dalhousie French Studies* 81 (Winter 2007): 1–12.



there is no reason for assuming that women and non-members were excluded from a performed reading of the poem, including the episode examined previously in this discussion. The mixture of sacred and profane material in the Blanchandine/Clarinde episode would have been appealing to a mixture of lay and religious attendants, especially on a feast day, perhaps that of St. Gilles on September 1, or of St. Eustachius on September 20, when for a few hours of festivity, Christian teaching could be subjected to novel, potentially subversive, and entertaining treatment in a *chanson de geste*.<sup>42</sup> It is significant that the feastdays of both saints whose hagiographies share features in common with *Tristan de Nanteuil* occur in September, since it is possible that a confraternity sponsored one performative reading of the poem during this month to honor both saints. As sexually transgressive as the exchanges between the women might have been perceived to be, this is countered by the reaffirmation of heteronormative practice by means of the divinely sanctioned change of gender identity and a narrative structure designed to advance the Church's orthodox teachings on the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist.

In the foregoing discussion I have argued that the Blanchandine/Clarinde episode of *Tristan de Nanteuil* intersects a story about cross-dressing and sexual transformation with one about religious conversion and regeneration. There was nothing especially new about using erotic language and situations to explore religious interiority and spiritual identity. A long tradition of Biblical exegesis had done this with the Song of Songs for centuries.<sup>43</sup> As Eva Parra Membrives demonstrates in her essay in this volume, the tenth-century canoness Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, who often discusses sexuality in her plays and narratives, uses erotic discourse for religious purposes.<sup>44</sup> However, the erotic sense of play that emerges from Blanchandine's relationship with the pagan princess Clarinde in *Tristan de Nanteuil* and the clearly obscene passage describing Blanchandin entering the bath appears inconsistent with the kind of ecclesiastical authorship and reception we traditionally associate with fully orthodox religious discourse. Put this assessment of the poem together with recent research concerning confraternities of jongleurs known to have sponsored and performed *chansons de geste*, and it appears distinctly possible that a confraternity in the region of Valenciennes was responsible for *Tristan de Nanteuil*. A public reading of this

<sup>42</sup> *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, V, 51 and VI, 194.

<sup>43</sup> See Ann Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995). See the work of Caroline Walker Bynum on the corporality of women's religious experience, especially *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone Books, 1991) and Lara Farina, *Erotic Discourse and Early English Religious Writing*, *The New Middle Ages* (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> "Lust ohne Liebe: Roswitha von Gandersheim und geschlechtsspezifische Strafen für sündigen Sex."

poem, with its combination of entertaining romantic narrative and sophisticated representation of religious doctrine, would have been especially appreciated on a feast day before a learned or popular audience.



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## Inseminating Ruth in the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book: A Romance of the Crusades

Ruth, among the most humble of Old Testament heroines, seems to have exerted particular fascination on the imagination of thirteenth-century audiences, particularly in royal and aristocratic circles in France. Prior to the middle decades of the thirteenth century, Ruth was almost absent in Christian iconography. But for a brief moment during the Capetian heyday her story appeared in a series of venues that include the stained-glass windows of Louis IX of France's Sainte-Chapelle (1246-1248) and a group of luxuriously illuminated manuscripts associated with the royal court and the leading families of the realm. After about 1320, however, Ruth no longer inspired artists and their patrons to the same extent, and indeed the subject would languish thereafter, receiving only momentary visual attention in such works as Nicolas Poussin's *Summer—Ruth and Boaz*, of about 1660. What this suggests is that the narrative of Ruth, in its visual form, had some compelling and timely meaning for the French ruling class of the mid-thirteenth century, a meaning so closely tied to the particular political, religious, and social conditions of the time and place that once these had passed into history, it lost its relevance and thus its appeal. In this essay, I examine what is perhaps the most spectacular of the thirteenth-century Ruth pictorial cycles, with an eye toward understanding some dimensions of its specificity to its historical moment. In the context of this volume on the history of sexuality, I am most interested in how this pictorial narrative emphasizes Ruth's identity as a sexual subject through visual rhetoric that aligns her with romance heroines, and what this strategy has to do with anxieties about lineage and the role of women in aristocratic households of the late Crusader period in France.

## 1. The Illuminations

The pictorial cycle in question is found in the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book (ca. 1250), a large-format book (each page measures approximately 30 x 39 cm) featuring a series of over 340 carefully selected narrative scenes based on the historical material of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> The ambition of the pictorial material is vast: the illuminated folios were originally free of text, and it is likely that the entire content of the manuscript was pictorial.<sup>2</sup> Thus the makers of this book were relatively free to reshape Biblical history in the guise of contemporary literary forms, such as the epic and the romance. Furthermore, the pictorial cycle brings forward other themes in the Book of Ruth that would have been of interest to the French aristocracy of the late Crusader era and that also feature prominently in contemporary literary genres, particularly romance; these include the social problems that arise when members of a community die overseas, and the role of widows and wives in the perpetuation of patrilineal identity grows in importance. While the cycle of paintings draws on standard exegetical interpretations of the Book of Ruth, it is deeply imbued with the sensibility of vernacular romance, positing Ruth and her future spouse Boaz as the protagonists of a tale of lovers whose unlikely but successful union is affirmed by its fertility. To the casual reader of the Biblical text, only this last—the satisfaction with the birth of a male heir—is familiar. Boaz's and Ruth's courtship, there, is on the surface largely a matter of cryptic legal proceedings.<sup>3</sup>

A brief synopsis of the Book of Ruth and its medieval exegesis is useful for understanding the particular narrative manipulations of the Ruth cycle in the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book. The Book of Ruth is set "in the time of the judges," and provides a genealogical bridge between Judges and 1 Kings (thus its

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<sup>1</sup> The manuscript primarily resides in New York, at the Pierpont Morgan Library (shelf number M.638), but three detached leaves, easily recognizable in the style, format, and dimensions are in other collections: two in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. nouv. acq. lat. 2294, folios 2-3) and one in Los Angeles (J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig I 6). Collectively, the New York, Paris, and Los Angeles fragments are also known as the Shah Abbas Bible, the Maciejowski Bible (both after previous owners), and the Morgan Picture Bible. I have chosen the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book because it seems the most accurately descriptive of these names.

<sup>2</sup> William Voelke, "Provenance and Place: The Morgan Picture Bible," *Between the Picture and the Word: Manuscript Studies from the Index of Christian Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2005) 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> On the legal questions raised by Ruth's marriage to Boaz, see Thomas and Dorothy Thompson, "Some Legal Problems in the Book of Ruth," *Vetus Testamentum* vol. 18, fasc. 1 (1968): 79-99. An insightful analysis of the inherently romantic aspects of the Book of Ruth is Francis Landy's "Ruth and the Romance of Realism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, 2 (1994): 285-317. Like many commentators, Landy remarks on Ruth's opacity and effacement in the narrative, hardly ideal characteristics of a romance heroine.

usual place, since the early thirteenth century, between these two books). It opens with a famine in Bethlehem and the resulting flight of a man, Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons to the gentile city of Moab. In Moab, Naomi is widowed and her sons marry local women. When the sons also die, Naomi resolves to return to Bethlehem and instructs her daughters-in-law to return to their parents. One of them, Orpha, obeys. The other, Ruth, cleaves to Naomi and declares that she will follow her anywhere, consider Naomi's people her own, worship Naomi's God, and die in the land where Naomi dies. So the two women go together to Bethlehem, where Ruth finds work as the lowliest of agricultural laborers—a gleaner. While she works, she attracts the attention of the landowner whose harvesters she follows. Boaz turns out to be a kinsman of Ruth's deceased father-in-law, and he extends his protection over her. When Naomi hears of this, she instructs Ruth to secure her position with Boaz by visiting him as he sleeps in his threshing-barn, and to creep under his bedclothes. This Ruth does, and Boaz, awakening, delivers a little oration on her virtue, assuring her that in the morning he will arrange her marriage, either to a kinsman with closer ties to Elimelech (who thereby has the first right of refusal on Ruth), or himself. The next morning, sealing his promise with a gift of barley, he sends her back to Naomi. Then, at the gate of the city, he encounters the closer kinsman, gathers ten elders, and formally requests the kinsman to either claim Ruth or give permission for her to marry Boaz. The man cedes the right to Ruth (and the property that goes with her), and symbolically doffs his shoe, which is explained as an ancient Israelite custom. Free to marry, Boaz and Ruth are joined and soon produce a son, Obed. The book closes with a genealogy that identifies Obed as the grandfather of David, and thus, a progenitor of the Royal House of Israel.

Throughout most of the Middle Ages, including the thirteenth century, several standard interpretations of Ruth coexisted and complemented one another. On a literal level, the story was understood as an explanation for the joining of gentile and Jewish lines of descent in the incarnate Christ—through Ruth, by way of Obed, David, and ultimately Mary, Jesus's human ancestry was made universal, rather than exclusively Jewish. This literal sense meshed cleanly with the typological sense; exegetes from Isidore of Seville to Hugh of St.-Cher associated Ruth with the gentile *Ecclesia* while identifying Naomi as the Jewish *Synagoga*—the joining of the two through the birth of Obed reinforced the Christian view of sacred history in which the Church is generated by the joining together of the Jewish tradition and the gentile mass of humanity. For the scholastic Richard of Saint Victor, "The land of Moab signifies the gentiles; Ruth, the church; the land of Israel, spiritual conversion," and so on.<sup>4</sup> Moral interpretations meanwhile

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<sup>4</sup> My translation of Richard of Saint-Victor, *Allegoriae in Vetus et novum Testamentum*, lib. IV, cap. 18. PL 175, 680D. Latin text: "Terra Moab significant gentilitatem; Ruth Ecclesiam; terra Israel,

stressed Ruth's humility, poverty, and model feminine fidelity, wisdom, and strength (again, all virtues associated with the personified Church): the Dominican preacher Nicholas of Hanaps, in his *Liber de exemplis* of 1260-1278, highlights just these properties of the character of Ruth as ideal for use in sermons.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for medieval Christian interpreters it is Ruth's non-Jewish race that allows her to become a type for Ecclesia, her low class and poverty that make her a moral model for the humble soul, and her submissive femininity and reproductive ability that make her not only a suitable wife for Boaz (despite her race and class), but an acceptable foremother to Christ himself.

Turning from the Biblical text and its attendant medieval commentaries to the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book's account of the Book of Ruth, we are confronted with a striking example of the complexity that characterizes the relationship between text and image in any period. Not only does the pictorial Book of Ruth begin *in media res*, with the discussion between Ruth, Orpha, and Naomi, but because the manuscript uses no verbal or consistent symbolic cues to indicate the break between the end of one narrative sequence and the opening of the next. One could easily imagine that the frieze of female figures displayed across the bottom register of folio 17 simply continues the similarly composed narrative above (Fig. 1). The pictures require a certain level of familiarity with the order of the Old Testament books, as well as with the stories they relate, but at the same time, they are not entirely faithful to the letter of the source texts. What's more, because unlike in a modern graphic novel (such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* or Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*) where the sometimes fluid, sometimes staccato transition from one narrative episode to the next is eased along by textual means, in the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book the viewer is left to his or her own devices to extract the story from the pictures alone, a phenomenon that hints at one possible mode of reception—the narrated viewing, in which one person speaks aloud, providing an ephemeral textual environment for the pictures. This cannot have been mere description, along the lines of “two women facing right, and one facing left, all raise their hands as if they are talking,” but something more illuminating, at minimum akin to a modern art-historical interpretation, though no doubt profoundly different in both its rhetorical strategy and its expository goals.<sup>6</sup>

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conversationem spiritualem.”

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas of Hanaps, *Liber de Exemplis Sacrae Scripturae*, cap. 74, 123-126, cited from manuscript sources in Gérard de Martel, *Répertoire des textes Latins relatifs au livre de Ruth (VII-XVe s.)*, Instrumenta Patristica 18 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 96.

<sup>6</sup> A somewhat earlier example of how a medieval viewer articulated and interpreted a visual experience comes from the *Liber de rebus in administratione sua gestis* of Abbot Suger of St.-Denis. He expounds on the metaphorical and theological senses of the various materials used in the construction of the Gothic abbey church, See Erwin Panofsky, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of*

The treatment of the Book of Ruth begins on the far left of the bottom register of folio 17 with Ruth declining Naomi's exhortation to return to the house of her parents, while Orpah obeys. In the center, Ruth and Naomi walk along together, and in a third scene on the far right, they approach Bethlehem, and the women of the city come out to welcome them. In the left half of the upper register of folio 17v (Fig. 2), Boaz rides into the scene on a horse, and points inquiringly at Ruth, who stands frontally, wearing white and holding a fat sheaf of barley in her arms. Between them, an overseer with a pitchfork raises one hand as if in speech. The right half of the register depicts a scene of harvest, including men reaping, women gleanings, Boaz, now off his horse, a man carrying sheaves on his shoulders, and an overseer, again apparently in conversation with Boaz. In the lower register, on the left, Boaz and Ruth share a picnic beneath a tree, accompanied by others of the laborers, while on the right, work is resumed as men pile sheaves of barley into a high stack. Across the opening, the top register of folio 18 (Fig. 3) depicts Ruth three times; first, on the left, we see her threshing her gleanings, then bringing the grain to the seated Naomi in a fold of her gown. On the right, Naomi instructs Ruth, who has already changed from her work-clothes into more aristocratic garb; she has also let down her hair. Below, in an extraordinary scene, Ruth does just as she has been directed by Naomi, crawling under the sleeping Boaz's cloak on her hands and knees to the far right, while the threshing and winnowing activities of the laborers occupy most of the space in the center and left of the composition. In the left of the upper register of folio 18v (Fig. 4) Boaz pours a large amount of barley into Ruth's outstretched mantle, which she then presents, on the right, to Naomi. Below, Boaz, seated in a throne-like chair, gesticulates at his kinsman, who is seated frontally on a lower stool, removing his shoe. The elders of Bethlehem look on from the right, gesturing variously. The happy outcome appears at the top of the facing page: Ruth reclines post-partum in a curtained bed, reaching out with an open handed gesture toward Naomi, seated to the right, who cuddles an infant. A group of standing women appears on the far right, their hands busily expressing their pleasure and approval (Fig. 5).

Though this is a relatively short narrative sequence compared to the stories of Saul and David that follow, the Book of Ruth in the Morgan Old Testament is in fact surprisingly expansive, given the brevity of the Biblical text it illustrates. Although it eliminates the background story of the flight of Elimelech and his family from Bethlehem to Moab, the marriage of the sons to Moabite women, and the subsequent deaths of Elimelech and both sons, the Book of Ruth is given ten scenes. This is five more than the entire story of Abraham and three more than Jacob. It is the only extended cycle dedicated to a female protagonist as well.



Precedents for an extensive narrative picture cycle dedicated to Ruth are found in the Munich Psalter (English, circa 1200),<sup>7</sup> another English Psalter of about 1220-1230 (now in the Walters Art Gallery),<sup>8</sup> the *Bibles Moralisées* of the 1220s-1240s,<sup>9</sup> the Old French Acre Bible of around the same date as the Morgan Old Testament<sup>10</sup>, and the stained glass program of the Sainte-Chapelle, just a few years earlier. With the exception of this last, the earlier cycles emphasize different aspects of and events from the scriptural narrative and exist in close relation to written texts that make (in some cases admittedly quixotic) references to the Book of Ruth. For example, the Acre Bible, and two of the four mid-century moralized Bibles include a scene that John Lowden has dubbed the *Peregrinatio*, or the flight of Elimelech and his family from Bethlehem, a logical event to include in that it frames the narrative and explains how Ruth, a Moabite woman, came to have anything to do with the Israelites.<sup>11</sup> Another scene that appears in nearly all of the other Ruth cycles is that of the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, either with the standing couple holding hands (as in the Acre Bible) or exchanging a ring (as in the Munich Psalter), or with the couple seated (and sometimes, presciently holding the infant Obed in their laps), as in the Toledo and Bodley manuscripts of the *Bible Moralisée* or the stained glass at the Sainte Chapelle. While such episodes help clarify the narrative and relate it to its various exegetical meanings (the marriage scene, for instance, formally evoking similar compositions that represent the marriage of the Church to Christ), the artists of the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book appear to have cut them out in favor of including more scenes that develop the agricultural setting of the narrative and focus attention on Ruth's and Boaz's relationship as it develops in an environment of fertility and ripening.

Of course, a medieval explanation of this series of pictures is likely to have had quite a different tone from mine and to have emphasized different aspects of the visual narrative, perhaps dwelling on the colors of some of the characters' costumes (as I too, will do, presently), or digressing to ask the members of the audience didactic questions. Depending on the narrator or the audience, different literary and rhetorical modes may have been invoked. Certainly, the structure, iconography, and pacing of the sequence allows for and even encourages multiple interpretations. While the classic exegetical topoi of Ruth as foremother of Christ, as Ecclesia, and as a prototype for the Virgin are present, at the same time the

<sup>7</sup> Munich, Staatsbibliothek, clm 835, f. 104, 104v.

<sup>8</sup> Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, MS W. 106, f. 18, 18v.

<sup>9</sup> Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 2554, f. 63\*v, 34\*v; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 1179, f. 83v-85v; Toledo, Tesoro de la Catedral, *Biblia de San Luis*, f. 93v-96; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 270B, f. 123v-126.

<sup>10</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms. 5211, f. 364v.

<sup>11</sup> John Lowden, *The Making of Bibles Moralisées*. Volume 2: *The Book of Ruth* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2000), 30.

editorial choices bring forward the resonance between the Biblical narrative and contemporary vernacular literary forms, including romance and its satirical cousin, the fabliau. In particular, the pictorial fascination with the agricultural processes and products that feature in the story, and the link established between images of vegetable fertility and human reproduction offers an entry into what I would call the vernacular sensibility of this cycle.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Insemination

Seeds and grain, with their obvious association with fertility and reproduction, give the artist ample opportunity to point toward the deep meaning of Ruth both as a Biblical text and as a different sort of narrative, governed by conventions familiar from the vernacular. In her very first appearance, Ruth holds a fat sheaf of barley as if it were a babe in arms, which, in a way, it is: Ruth is a gleaner, and gleaners, as the continuation of the scene to the right demonstrates, gather only meager and scanty stalks left by the reapers. Ruth's barley sheaf, by contrast, suggests miraculous and redemptive fertility, both by its similarity to the infant held by her mother-in-law in the final scene, and in the way it sets up the white-clad Ruth as a parallel figure to the newly popular sculptural type of the standing Virgin, as exemplified by the trumeau figure from the south portal of the west façade of Amiens Cathedral (Fig. 6). The scene establishes the agricultural collection and processing of grain as an operative metaphor. Not only does it engage the exegetical senses of the narrative, but it also figures at an earthier level; Boaz's strong pointing gesture in the leftmost scene is accompanied by what might be described as a penetrating gaze at Ruth, who stares right back, as if emboldened by the evidence of her fertility cradled in her arms. The semiosis of sex is hardly subtextual here. As Sarah Gordon demonstrates in her contribution to this volume, medieval audiences hardly needed the parallel ah! between vegetable seeds and semen spelled out for them, any more than we do today.

In her study of the stained glass at the Sainte-Chapelle, which includes the pictorial cycle of Ruth closest in conception and iconography to that found in the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book, Alyce Jordan pointed out that the designers of the windows must have been familiar with contemporary theories of narratology and poesis that stressed the concept of *amplificatio*—the strategic repetition of and expansion on specific elements in a narrative in order to direct the audience's attention toward certain aspects of its semiotic potential.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Sarah Gordon.

<sup>13</sup> Alyce Jordan, *Visualizing Kingship in the Windows of the Sainte-Chapelle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 10-14.

Considering the strong iconographic and thematic ties between the Sainte-Chapelle and the Morgan manuscript, it is not surprising to find a similar approach to repetition in the latter. Daniel Weiss noted of the manuscript as a whole that it uses repetition to emphasize themes of military conflict and sacrifice.<sup>14</sup> Within the pictorial narrative of Ruth, however, these violent themes are replaced by the insistent return to the subject of grain and the harvest.

Having established the theme in the upper left of folio 17v, the artists return to it with tenacity in the following scenes. In the upper right, for example, not only do five figures of varying sizes move across the foreground of the composition, crouched low as they reap or glean, but behind them, roughly in the center of the composition, a male figure, dressed mostly in white, carries a huge quantity of sheaved barley on his back. The white of his tunic makes a visual rhyme with Ruth's white gown in the preceding scene, and his burden of barley, which Boaz seems to indicate with his pointing hand, iterates the suggestion that Boaz is generously endowed with fertility. Directly beneath this episode, in the lower right quadrant of the page, a scene in which the laborers (including one figure who is a virtual twin of the barley-carrier above) stack up the sheaves into an elaborately arranged, vertical mound. This mounting pile, when viewed in concert with the scene to its left, depicting Ruth, Boaz, and the field hands eating, provides a comment on the mounting romantic and sexual tension between the two protagonists. United by a cloth that covers both of their laps, divided by the ewer and bowl of vinegar into which they dip their bread, Ruth and Boaz once again gaze intently at one another—though this is hardly as erotic to modern eyes as the famous eating scene from the 1963 film adaptation of *Tom Jones*<sup>15</sup>. Put in its historical context, and set beside the redundancy of grain imagery on the page, one can begin to get a sense of the charge it may have delivered for its medieval audiences.

One aspect of its potency has to do with its decisive departure from the Biblical text it purports to illustrate. In the scriptural account, Ruth “sat at the side of the reapers... and took the leavings” (Ruth 2:14); there is no mention of her sharing the meal with Boaz, and certainly no indication that Ruth would be seated on the ground with the landowner, in a privileged position near the vinegar dish, while the other workers sit farther away or stand to eat. Another facet of this pictorial treatment of the episode is that it recalls a well-known episode from the *Tristan*

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<sup>14</sup> Weiss, “The Old Testament Image,” 8-9.

<sup>15</sup> Directed by Tony Richardson and based on Henry Fielding's comic novel of 1729, the film starred Albert Finney as Tom, and Joyce Redman as his dining partner, Mrs. Waters. On the erotics of the gaze in medieval illumination (particularly of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), esp. 20-29.

tradition; the scene where Tristan and Yseut tryst in the garden, beneath a tree, knowing all the while that King Mark is hiding above them, waiting to catch them in some impropriety. Their doubled, deceptive language heightens the erotic tension of the encounter; Yseut, for example, insisting that she has been faithful and that God should strike her down if any man but he who took her virginity has been her lover, by which Mark is meant to understand himself, but the audience, being privy to the substitution of Yseut's maid, Brangien, on the wedding night, knows better.<sup>16</sup> Though surviving visual representations of this scene in particular postdate the Morgan Old Testament (Fig. 7), the literary topos was already very much part of the common cultural currency of the audience for the manuscript's audience.<sup>17</sup> The yearning desire between the lovers in the romance may have bled over into the Biblical narrative, infusing it with a quality of sensuality and sexual immanence, and bringing forward those aspects of the scriptural account that might be understood, from a romance perspective, as somewhat racy.<sup>18</sup> The big stack of barley starts, in this light, to look less like a cigar, with apologies to Freud.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For the text, see, for example Beroul, v. 22-25, in *Tristan et Iseut: les poèmes français, la saga norroise*, ed. Philippe Walter (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1989), 22.

<sup>17</sup> The earliest written version of the tale is found in the unique Beroul manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. Fr. 2171, and dates to between 1150-1190 (T.B.W. Reid, *The Tristan of Beroul: a textual commentary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), 3-4). Illustrated manuscripts of the *Tristan* tradition began to appear in the 1240s, and a famous series of tiles from Chertsey Abbey are thought to date to the 1250s. See: Norbert Ott, "Katalog der Tristan-Bildzeugnisse," *Text und Illustration im Mittelalter*, ed. Hella Frühmorgen-Voss (Munich: Beck, 1975), 140-71; Michael Curschmann, "Images of Tristan" *Gottfried von Strassburg and the Medieval Tristan Legend*, ed. Adrian Stevens and Roy Wiseby (London: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 1-17; Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden, "Discursive Illustrations in Three Tristan Manuscripts," *Word and Image in Arthurian Literature*, ed. Keith Busby (New York: Garland, 1996), 284-319; Julia Walworth, "Tristan in Medieval Art," *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. Joan T. Grimbert (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 255-300.

<sup>18</sup> This visual play between sacred and secular narrative would complement the visual association between the *Tristan* orchard scene and imagery of the Fall, as noted by Curschmann, "Images of Tristan," 16.

<sup>19</sup> In his Introduction to this volume, Albrecht Classen cites Michael Camille's description of a fifteenth-century illustration from the *Historia Troiana* by Martinus Opifex, which Camille, in his usual, puckish fashion, gave the title "Achilles' scores." The "labial lips" of the tent in which the hero beds his conquest (who is not visible) do seem an almost parodic synechdoche for the absent female body. Such examples demonstrate that the practice of visual sexual innuendo was not in the least foreign to medieval artists and their audiences; another famous case cited by Camille in the same volume is the ivory mirror case from about 1320 (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London) depicting a couple (possibly Tristan and Yseut) playing chess)—here, the male lover clutches at an upright tent pole as he makes his move, while his lady-love, recoiling slightly, spreads her knees to reveal a fold in her dress that is so unmistakably a vagina that most modern viewers, upon seeing it, are given to snigger. (*The Medieval Art of Love: Objects and Subjects of Desire* (London: Harry S. Abrams, 1998), 124. As Siegfried Christoph points out in his contribution to this

Across the opening, and thus on view at the same time as the scenes of harvest and eating, are five episodes that continue the metaphorical trajectory. In the upper register, on the left, Ruth appears as a doubled figure. In her leftmost manifestation, she uses a flail to thresh the barley she has gleaned. Overlapping this figure is another, giving the narrative pace a breathless quality. This second Ruth turns toward the seated figure of Naomi, presenting her with the processed grain. Oddly, she carries a sack on her head, but it appears empty; the barley lies in the fold of her outer garment, just in front of her abdomen. Dramatically painted swags of gray drapery emphasize the fullness of her skirt where it cradles the grain. This Ruth allegorizes female fertility in any number of ways; her empty sack resembles, in its form and its metaphoric dimensions, contemporary anatomical notions of the uterus, while the position and substance of the burden she carries in her skirt points forward, to her eventual impregnation.<sup>20</sup> Not incidentally, the next time she appears, in the upper right of the same page, she is receiving Naomi's instructions to "wash thyself... and anoint thee, and put on thy best garments, and go down to the barnfloor," to Boaz, where she should "lift up the clothes wherewith he is covered towards his feet, and... lay thyself down there" (Ruth 3: 3-4). Over her plain gray gown she now wears a blue cloak lined with vair, and she has let down her hair. Throughout this manuscript, as Diane Wolfthal has shown, loose hair on a woman indicates her status of sexual vulnerability and availability.<sup>21</sup>

The theme of grain as a visual metaphor for fertility and insemination is continued in the subsequent scenes. In the lower register of folio 18, Ruth, her hair loose as above, crawls on her hands and knees under a swag of the blanket that covers the classically reposed figure of Boaz. He reclines on a bed made entirely of sheaves of harvested grain. This group of Ruth, Boaz, and the barley, takes up only the right-most quarter of the bottom half of the page, however. To the left the artist has depicted a group of four laborers: two threshers, an overseer, and a man with a winnowing fan. Directly below the threshing figure of Ruth in the upper

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volume, innuendo, while not absolutely pervasive, was certainly a major literary tactic as well both then and today.

<sup>20</sup> The association of the sack and the uterus is widely found in later, Netherlandish art, as Susan Koslow has argued. Drawing on Aristotelean concepts of female anatomy and theological arguments about the nature of the incarnation, such painters as Rogier van der Weyden and Hans Memling often included an image of a hanging sack of bed-curtains in their images of the Annunciation. The sack indicates the womb of the Virgin (Susan Koslow, "The Curtain-Sack: A Newly-Discovered Incarnation Motif in Rogier van der Weyden's 'Columba Annunciation'," *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 7, no. 13 (1986): 9-33. However, whether Ruth's empty sack in this miniature refers to contemporary anatomical notions is a question that requires additional inquiry.

<sup>21</sup> Diane Wolfthal, *Images of Rape: The "Heroic" Tradition and its Alternatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 43.

register, a man in a red *cotte*, green breeches, and a loincloth exposed by the killing up of his *cotte* provides a kind of mirror image; he faces right where she faces left, and is insistently masculine where she is feminine, but their poses are virtually identical. The overseer, in blue, standing to the right and a little behind the first thresher (to judge by the fact that his feet are obscured by the straw on the floor), also shows some leg. There's no reason for this: he's not working, but holding his pitchfork over his shoulder, as he has done in previous scenes (for example, on the top of folio 17v, visible across the opening).

Still, he hitches up his *cotte* almost to the top of his apparently bare thigh, and a little fillip of fabric peeks out from behind his hand right at the level of his crotch. The third laborer, dressed only in his drawers, is one of those exemplary figures that this artist was so adept at drawing, an almost classical semi-nude viewed from a partial rear view. He brings his threshing flail down to the floor, its strong diagonal emerging from behind his body at the level of his hips. Finally, on the other side of the thin, green colonnette that divides the two halves of the lower register, and thus in the same pictorial frame as Boaz and Ruth, a fourth laborer appears. He faces left, his back to the couple and the bed of sheaves, but his trailing foot is obscured behind Boaz's ankles. In his kilted tan *cotte*, his blue hose, and his visible loincloth, as well as in his round-shouldered posture, he echoes the left-most figure and forms the closing bracket to the threshing scene. Instead of threshing, though, he winnows, raising his leading knee in what appears a kind of capering dance as he tosses the grain in his winnowing fan high.

This naturalistic, almost genre-like scene of agricultural labor draws visual attention to the substance and semiotics of grain. The winnower, in particular, has an inescapably sexual aspect, with his long, tapered, upward-pointing basket held in front of his loins and shown spouting seeds. Comparisons with the only other extended visual mediation on agricultural labor to be found in the Morgan Old Testament Picture Book support a reading that both identifies this episode with themes of sacred fertility and also points to the way in which the rendition found in the Book of Ruth embraces a kind of lyric sensuality not contained in the earlier scene. This is located in the bottom register of folio 12v (Fig. 8), and depicts the calling of Gideon, and his sacrifice under the oak tree (Judges 6:11-21). On the left, several figures familiar from the Book of Ruth show up: the man carrying a sheaf on his shoulders, the two threshers, and the overseer, here replaced with a figure holding a rake.

One of the two threshers (the bearded one to the left) is presumably Gideon himself, who was, according to the Biblical account, threshing when the angel came to him. This group, sheaf-carrier, threshers, and man with rake, form a discrete group depicting the moment in the narrative when the angel appears, swooping out of the sky from the second arch of the painted arcade that frames the scene. Tying this scene to the next, where Gideon sacrifices a kid, is another

winnower, his trailing foot behind that of the right-most thresher. Though very similar to the winnower in the Ruth sequence, this figure faces right, wears only drawers, and holds the basket awkwardly, so that its inner surface is visible; the grain that fills the long, pointed end of the fan does fly up into the air a bit, but not nearly as emphatically as the grain in the miniature from the Book of Ruth. The tip of the fan points directly at Gideon's raised hand, with which he pours broth from a jug over the burning meat on the altar. Here, the grain is tied appropriately to the sacrifice, since Gideon's offering included bread as well as a kid. Furthermore, it helps signal Gideon's transformation from farmer to a holy man and warrior by drawing attention to his newly dignified manner of dress and the new orientation of his action. Looking across the opening, the gesture with the winnowing fan also points to one of those spectacular, full-frieze scenes of cavalry warfare for which the manuscript is justly famous.

The more spacious composition of the threshing scene in the Book of Ruth, along with the clever use of figural rhymes and reversals not only to frame it as a kind of visual stanza, but also to tie it to the scenes above, indicate a different approach to storytelling at work. Whereas the Gideon scenes have the direct thrust of historical prose narrative (first Gideon was called, then he sacrificed, and then he met success in battle), the Ruth scene has the rhythmic quality of lyric; it might almost be construed as a musical interlude that comments on the actions taking place in the far right corner of the register. The subtle, as well as the not-so-subtle, pictorial interest in male genitalia, yoked to the business of beating the fruitful grain from the straw and separating the seeds from the chaff, suggests that this commentary interprets Ruth's encounter with Boaz as including insemination. For as long as the Book of Ruth has been the subject of exegesis, readers have differed on the question of whether Ruth's nocturnal visit constituted a seduction and whether it resulted in sexual intercourse. The creators of the Morgan Old Testament seem to have come down on the positive side of the question, though not in any sense by way of moral condemnation. Ruth's sexual engagement with Boaz is necessary to the happy conclusion of the tale in the birth of a child, and, as I will argue farther along, her submissive posture and her bridal appearance (fine clothing, loose hair) align her with various heroines of romance who engage in sex with a lover outside the recognized boundaries of marriage but within the moral universe of love.

In any event, any lingering doubt about what has happened between Ruth and Boaz seems to be clarified upon turning the page. At the top of folio 18v, two scenes employ the visual metaphor of grain to great effect. On the left, Boaz pours a measure of barley into the folds of Ruth's cloak. Ruth, her hair still loose, holds her arms out to create a deep swag of fabric that nonetheless looks as if it will soon overflow with the seeds that spill from Boaz's bucket. A useful comparison is the scene from Genesis (f. 6r) in which Joseph's steward measures out grain for his

brothers (Fig. 9); here, the brothers hold out sacks or lengths of cloth, and the steward tips a full bucket, but the grain is not shown sliding from one conveyance to the next—rather, both are simply full. Where Joseph's act of dissemination is indirect, Boaz's is intimate. The metaphoric insemination begins to ripen on the right, where Ruth stands, approaching the seated Naomi once again. She cradles the burden of Boaz's grain in her cloak as if it were a child, one arm supporting its "head," the other wrapped supportively under its bottom. Across the opening, Naomi's gesture of cradling the infant Obed in the last scene from the Book of Ruth makes a visual rhyme with Ruth's cradling of the barley, underscoring the barley's significance. A summary of the sequence, viewed horizontally across the whole opening would then read: insemination, gestation, parturition.

But that would leave out the scene that occupies the entire bottom register of folio 18v. Why did the designer of this narrative choose to place such emphasis on the strange ritual of consent in which Boaz's kinsman doffs his shoe? In light of the emphasis on grain, male genitalia, and reproduction in the corresponding register on the preceding page (the threshing scene), could it be possible that the medieval visual interpretation of the strange custom revolves around a substitution of the shoe for the penis? After all, the point of this episode in the Book of Ruth seems to be that it signals Boaz's lawful claim to Ruth as a wife, and therefore, sexual partner. The depiction of the kinsman, showing him from the front, seated, with his half-bare foot drawn up right between his legs, has prompted more than one modern observer to raise an eyebrow. Furthermore, the Biblical text itself frames the whole discussion between Elimelech and his kinsman in agricultural terms; Boaz begins by asking if the man would like to buy "a parcel of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech," (Ruth 4:3), and only when the man says, yes, he would, does Elimelech mention that this means he will also need to marry Ruth to make good on the responsibilities of kinship. At this point, the man cedes his rights over the field and the woman, who are elided by the transaction. The presence of the group of putative elders in the Morgan Old Testament (some of them are beardless youths) not only affirms the legal agreement signified by the removal of the shoe, but places the tale back in the sphere of the masculine concerns of the community; inheritance, ownership, and lineage. Lineage, in particular, emerges here as a central preoccupation. The entirety of folio 19 interests itself in the production of male heirs. The top register represents Obed's birth as a kind of prelude to the opening of 1 Kings in the lower register, where the childless Hannah mournfully trails along after Peninnah and her numerous brood.

One more piece of evidence that helps tie the seemingly dry, legalistic concerns of the penultimate scene from the Book of Ruth in the Morgan Old Testament to the more erotic and bodily themes it explores elsewhere has to do with the cultural significance of shoes in the Middle Ages. The folklorist Alan Dundes's work on the Cinderella tradition has shown that the motif of the shoe in courtship narrative



goes back to the medieval period.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the giving, receiving, putting-on, and taking-off of shoes seems to have figured variously in medieval marriage practices, although most of the evidence that has been studied comes from the German-speaking regions.<sup>23</sup> Michael Camille, speaking of an embossed shoe of probably French origin, speculated that it “had in addition to any erotic fascination a more complex discursive moral content,” specifically that the shoe’s imagery reminded both lady and her would-be lover of her position as the gatekeeper of virtue against the “animal passions of her suitor.”<sup>24</sup>

Certainly the predominance of romance motifs (in particular, the image of Tristan and Yseut in the orchard) on extant decorated slippers suggests that shoes and eroticism were no less closely associated in the minds of medieval people than they are in the minds of those with a taste for Manolo Blahnik high-heeled sandals today.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Romancing Ruth

As the preceding discussion begins to indicate, many of the narrative choices made by the artist responsible for the Book of Ruth illuminations in the Morgan Old Testament draw on literary modes of representation that would have informed the outlook of the manuscript’s audience of Francophone aristocrats. The parallels between, on the one hand, the trysting scene from Tristan and other literary representations of the “garden of love,” such as that found in the *Roman de la Rose*, or (for the more erudite) the *De Amore* of Andreas Capellanus, and on the other hand the pictorial narrative of Ruth may have enriched the viewers’ understanding of the story of Ruth’s courtship with Boaz. None of this is surprising in the larger context of the Morgan Old Testament which has often been

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<sup>22</sup> Alan Dundes, *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook* (New York: Garland, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Rechtalterthümer*. 4th ed. expanded by Andreas Heusler and Rudolf Hübner. Vol. 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1899), 213-15; Ruth Schmidt-Wiegand, “Hochzeitsbräuche,” *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte*, ed. A. Erler (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1978), vol. 2, col. 190.

<sup>24</sup> Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 103.

<sup>25</sup> On the predominance of the Tristan theme on Dutch fourteenth and fifteenth century shoes, see Kathryn Starkey, “Tristan Slippers: An Image of Adultery on a Symbol of Marriage?” *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Cloth Work and Other Cultural Imaginings*, ed. E. Jane Burns (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 35-53. Jacob Nacht noted the role of shoes as symbols of courtship, fertility, and offspring in the Old Testament, the Midrash, and European folk-custom (“The Symbolism of the Shoe with Special Reference to Jewish Sources,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s. 6, 1 (1915): 1-22, especially 14-19). Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), observed that shoes are almost universally associated with desire, be it sexual (in the case of many men, and especially fetishists) or consumerist (98-99, 106).

understood as a pictorial “text” that “reads” like contemporary vernacular epic. Much of the imagery in the book celebrates knightly exploits, casting Old Testament warriors such as Gideon and Joshua as hardy crusaders themselves. Embedded in the Biblical scenes are bold references to the *chansons de geste* that surely entertained and encouraged the crusaders as they pursued their more or less hopeless attempts to recapture Jerusalem: a series of named swords (the inscriptions are on the blades) carried by Biblical warriors associate these figures with their epic counterparts—in one case, specifically with Charlemagne.<sup>26</sup>

Plentiful scenes of battle and mayhem, knights and nobles dressed in the contemporary styles of mid-thirteenth-century France, and a selective approach to the narratives of the Old Testament history books that emphasizes action heroes over prophets and law-givers, make abundantly clear the ideological thrust of the manuscript; these pictures align the history of the rise of the Kingdom of Israel with contemporary aristocratic French experiences of Crusade and conquest.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the very structure of the pictorial narrative evokes the pattern of *laisses similaires*, or repetitive strophes, characteristic of the *chansons de geste*. While the Morgan artists never double back on themselves to retell an episode from a slightly different angle, as the composers of epic would, they do return to nearly identical visual “tellings” of different events, invoking visual formulae that underscore the parallels between the two episodes, even if they are distant from one another in the chronological sequence of the narrative. For instance, the nearly identical composition of two battle scenes involving David leading an army against the Philistines (folios 29v below and 39 above, illustrating, respectively, I Kings 18:27 and II Kings 5:17-20) help the viewer understand that David overcame this same army twice, once as a youthful servant of Saul, and once as king in his own right (he is crowned in the later episode). In a narrative without words, such devices are crucial to anchoring the story into the viewer’s memory of the verbal account; this is not simply a case of rote copying for speed of production—details vary considerably—but a pictorial device.

Ruth’s story, however, is hardly the stuff of epic. Despite the exegetical emphasis on Ruth as a foremother of Christ which does evoke the lineal concerns of epic, her centrality to the narrative and its focus on matters agricultural and reproductive places it outside the usual matter of *chansons de geste*. Moreover, unlike epic heroines, who typically enact the roles of wise councilor and nurturer of men, or of unearthly antagonist, Ruth is most importantly a being defined by her sexual

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<sup>26</sup> C. Griffith Mann, “Picturing the Bible in the Thirteenth Century,” *The Book of Kings: Art, War, and the Morgan Library’s Medieval Picture Bible*, ed. William Noel and Daniel Weiss (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 2002), 55-56, n. 48.

<sup>27</sup> This was first observed by Harvey Stahl, “The Iconographic Sources of the Old Testament Miniatures, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 638,” Ph. D. dissertation, New York University 1974, 80.

status, first as widow, then as bride, and finally as mother.<sup>28</sup> As she places herself first under the protection of Naomi and then that of Boaz, she closely resembles a familiar type from the romance tradition, the disenfranchised damsel (sometimes a young widow, sometimes a virgin) who turns to an older woman for shelter and advice until an errant knight discovers her and earns access to her sexual favors through his chivalric virtue.<sup>29</sup> The structure of the narrative, too, reflects that typical element of vernacular romance, in particular what has been called “generic unity,” characterized by Norris Lacy as “retrogressive”—that is, it makes connections between episodes based on non-sequential (in addition to sequential) motifs or patterns, often clarifying a previously somewhat inscrutable passage with a later return that ties the motif back into the sense of the narrative.<sup>30</sup>

One example that illustrates not only the iconographic engagement with romance in the Ruth cycle, but also the parallels in structure between the pictorial narrative and vernacular tales of love is the scene where Ruth and Boaz first make contact (folio 17v, top left). Charged with tension by Boaz’s pointing gesture, and by Ruth’s arrested movement (her hips sway slightly to the right, but her head turns back over her shoulder to the left), the scene introduces the theme of agricultural fertility and calls on the viewer’s visual memory of depictions of the Virgin and Child, as discussed above. But its polysemia is more fecund even than that; Ruth, in her white garb (the only example in the entire manuscript of a woman dressed completely in white), also calls to mind the whiteness that is inevitably associated with the heroine of romance.<sup>31</sup> And looking diagonally across the opening, to the scene in which Ruth, her hair unbound, creeps on hands and knees under the cloak of the sleeping Boaz stirs up a further romance association with a heroine whose name is whiteness; Blanchefleur. In Chrétien de Troyes’s

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<sup>28</sup> Penny Schine Gold identified the role of the female nurturer/counselor in the *Chanson de Guillaume* and *Raoul de Cambrai*, (*The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France*. Women in Culture and Society [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987]), see esp. 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> Anna Roberts, “Helpful Widows, Virgins in Distress: Women’s Friendship in French Romance of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Cindy Carlson and Angela Weisl (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 37-41.

<sup>30</sup> Norris Lacy, “Spatial Form in Medieval Romance,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 51 Approaches to Medieval Romance, ed. Peter Haidu (1974): 160-69.

<sup>31</sup> The equation of whiteness and beauty in the romance tradition has a large bibliography; Alice Colby characterized twelfth-century literary portraits of the heroine thus; “long, gleaming blond hair divided by a straight parting; a reasonably large, smooth white forehead; finely drawn dark eyebrows with a wide space between them; sparkling eyes; a bright face; a rosy, youthful complexion; a straight, well-formed nose that is not very large; a small mouth with moderately full red lips and small white teeth not separated by wide spaces; a long neck; gently curving shoulders; long straight arms; white hands with long slender fingers; a white bosom with little breasts; a small waist; and slender sides and hips.” *The Portrait in Twelfth-Century French Literature* (Geneva: Droz, 1965), 69.

*Conte du Graal* she joins Perceval in bed despite her status as an unmarried virgin, and the proceedings are as vague in the romance as they are in the Book of Ruth.<sup>32</sup> Roger Sherman Loomis remarked that while she may remain a virgin, her dalliance was “what would have been characterized by any moralist of the Middle Ages as *folie*.”<sup>33</sup> In either instance, however, the folly of love seems to be leading in the “right” direction for romance, to wit, marriage.<sup>34</sup> It is only in the retrogressive mode of viewing, however, that such parallels emerge.

On a higher structural level, the alignment of the Book of Ruth with the romance mode is also visible. The five folios that depict episodes from Ruth offer a respite of peace and fecundity after the spasms of gruesome violence immediately preceding and all too soon to follow. The shift from the predominantly epic mode to the romantic, then even erotic, and possibly humorous, is signaled by the contrast between the hectic violence of the preceding episodes, still on view as one contemplates the opening of Ruth (Fig. 8).

Against the horrific aftermath of the rape of the Levite’s wife shown on folio 16 verso, the two scenes on folio 17 appear as models of decorousness—the figures dance, rather than slash, their way through the action. But sex is still the subtext, and it’s not very deeply buried in the scene in the upper register of folio 17, depicting the kidnapping and forced marriage of the virgins of Shiloh by the Benjamites. There is no irony intended here—the rape that redeems a rape is redemptive because its motivation, the preservation of the lineage of Benjamin, falls clearly within the social logic of a predominantly patrilineal, aristocratic audience. On the other hand, the ideal marriage, for the audience of the Morgan Old Testament, is the marriage of mutual love, desire, and consent as presented again and again in romance (in fact, the contrast between the “marriage” of the virgins of Shiloh and the romance of Ruth might have struck a particularly resonant chord for an aristocratic woman viewer whose typical marriage situation had more in common with the former than that latter, romance-ideals aside). Just to give one particularly pertinent example, in *Erec et Enide*, Enide is married, for love, to Erec, but then, due to the tortuous twists of the plot, nearly forced into a

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<sup>32</sup> For the Blanchefleur episode: Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Conte du Graal*, ed. and trans. Charles Méla (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990), v. 2012-2024 (160). Although the lovers spend the night “boche et boche, braz a braz” (“mouth to mouth and entangled in one another’s arms,” v. 2026), afterwards Chrétien still names Blanchefleur “pucele” (“maiden,” v. 2029).

<sup>33</sup> Roger Sherman Loomis, “The Grail Story of Chrétien de Troyes as Ritual and Symbolism,” *PMLA* 71, 4 (1956): 840-52; here 842.

<sup>34</sup> Of course, in the *Conte du Graal* and other versions of the Perceval story, the relationship between the hero and Blanchefleur is problematic, not least because they may be close relations (even half-siblings); in the Book of Ruth, it is precisely the preexisting familial relationship between Boaz and Ruth’s deceased first husband that forms the basis of their potential as marriage partners. On Perceval, see Joseph Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 78-79.

second (bigamous) marriage with the lecherous Count of Limors (both of them believing Erec dead). The contrast between the ultimate success of the love-match and the last-minute failure of the marriage-by-force demonstrates the romance ethos in which female desire for a mate is natural and good, but cannot be directed against the heroine's will. Ruth's status as a consenting and desiring party to the manipulations that will ultimately result in her own sexual reconquest is indicated in the opening scene, where she places her hand on Naomi's shoulder in stark contrast to the figure of the virgin directly above her, who rather than touching, is touched, or more precisely, manhandled.

Closing the brackets that distinguish the romance of Ruth from the epic matter of the pictorial cycle at large, the first scenes of I Kings that follow the birth of Obed depicted on the top of folio 18 continue the motif of a procession of figures dominated by the adult women, Penninah and Hannah. Penninah's fertility, indicated by the crowd of what appear to be quintuplet sons who follow her, is contrasted to Hannah's barren state; like Ruth above her, Peninnah raises one hand in an open gesture, indicating the ram her husband Elkanah prepares to offer at an altar on the left. The ram, held by Elkanah visually rhymes with the infant Obed, held by Naomi above. As Daniel Weiss has observed, one of the signal themes of the Morgan Old Testament, profoundly connected to "the harsh realities of crusading," is sacrifice.<sup>35</sup>

From the agrarian idyll of Ruth and Boaz, this rhyme announces, the narrative gears are now shifting back toward the brutal, sweeping drama of dominion and war. Indeed: while the next opening deals entirely with the prophet Samuel's birth, childhood, and youth, sacrifice is twice again depicted—once when Hannah "lends" her son to God, and a second time when Samuel cooks sacrificial meat in an enormous cauldron. And turning the page once again, we find the armies of Israel, clad in the chain mail and bucket-shaped helmets of medieval knights, riding off to join a disastrous battle.

The romance-like qualities of the pictorial narrative of the Book of Ruth make it stand out from the rest of the manuscript. While it shares the epic sensibility of the other narratives in its concern with lineage, the number of scenes devoted to Ruth's interactions with Boaz points toward an approach that is more erotic and more, as they say, "sex-positive" than that found elsewhere in the manuscript. The remaining questions have to do with why this particular aspect of the Book of Ruth was brought to the fore in the Morgan Old Testament, and what this has to do with the crusading culture that produced the manuscript. Between the peculiarities of the Biblical narrative and the insistently ecclesiological interpretation canonized in clerical approaches to the book, what made the

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<sup>35</sup> Weiss, "The Old Testament Image," 9.

romantic potential of Ruth—and also its potential as social commentary (or more likely, social prescription)—suddenly, and literally visible in the middle of the thirteenth century?

#### 4. The Historical Moment: Some Concluding Observations

Part of the answer lies with the unique character of Louis IX's reign. Louis, having come to the throne very young, conducted the first decade of his rule with the guidance of his mother, Blanche of Castile, who was regent from 1226.<sup>36</sup> Under her tutelage, he received a religious formation that surely contributed to his lifelong reputation for extreme piety and his openly expressed enthusiasm for such projects as the (by then more or less hopeless) Crusades and the lay-preaching of the Franciscan and other Mendicant orders. Louis's long reign saw the consolidation of many of the institutions that would come to characterize the French monarchy and French ethnic identity in the following centuries, but it also saw the decline of many of the older institutions and social practices which had defined the western Frankish realms in the post-Carolingian period.<sup>37</sup> Louis's responsibility for and participation in these changes is the subject of much scholarly discussion, but it is undeniable that during the period between about 1234 (the year of Louis's marriage to Marguerite of Provence) and 1270 (Louis's death from dysentery while on crusade), the French royal court and its aristocratic affiliates engaged in the changes that defined their times in part through their patronage and reception of art-forms as diverse as epic verse, prose and lyric romance, music sacred and secular, and visual media including everything from embroidered bed-hangings to illuminated books.

The majority of thirteenth-century pictorial renditions of Ruth can be related to this milieu. the *Bibles Moralisées* were almost certainly produced for Blanche, Louis, and their close associates.<sup>38</sup> The *Acre Bible*, produced in Syria for a crusader patron, is in French. The glass of the Sainte-Chapelle, which shares the Morgan Old Testament's fascination with the setting of agricultural fecundity, was the result of Louis's personal patronage, and reflects his ideological mission to align his crusading activities with the heroic deeds of the Old Testament. The patronage of the Morgan Old Testament remains uncertain, but it was in all likelihood

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<sup>36</sup> On Blanche's regency and the transfer of power to Louis, see William Jordan, *Louis IX and the Challenge of the Crusade: a Study in Rulership* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 4-9.

<sup>37</sup> See Georges Duby, "The Transformation of the Aristocracy: France at the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century," *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 178-85.

<sup>38</sup> Lowden, vol. II, 199-202.

produced either for Louis himself or for his nephew, Robert II of Artois, in the decade between 1244 and 1254, during which time he planned and undertook his first crusading adventure.<sup>39</sup> What the patrons of all of these works shared was their profound involvement in an idealistic military adventure that was fated to take them far from their homes and in many cases to result in their deaths overseas. They also shared the medieval aristocracy's concern about lineage; in a society where property passed from father to son, ideally, the prospect of an extended absence from home was fraught with anxiety about the continuation of one's legitimate patrilineage. One worrisome question had to do with what the women would be up to while the men were away (of course, some took their wives with them, though it is not entirely clear that this would have solved the problem).<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, as landholders whose wealth (such as it was) was rooted in the agricultural fertility of their property, these pledged crusaders cannot but have worried about what would happen to those lands while they, and many of their male retainers, were absent.

In this context, the pictorial account of the Book of Ruth offered by the Morgan Old Testament is comforting. Not only does it situate the home-front outside the brutal, epic world of warfare in terms akin to contemporary vernacular literature; it also supplies a reassuring narrative about feminine compliance, fertility, and dedication to the preservation of a patriline. The typological elision of Ruth the ancestress of Christ with Ecclesia was extended to an identification with the romance heroine and thus with the ideal of chaste and lovely femininity that the crusaders revered both in its literary manifestation and in its religious aspect as the image of the Virgin. Ruth, as the guardian and perpetuator of a male line, but also as a model widow, bride, and wife, was particularly pertinent to a society grappling with the domestic repercussions of the projected crusade. The abundant agricultural imagery seems to be, from this perspective, almost like a talisman, ensuring both human and vegetable reproductive success against the threats of lineal extinction and famine that loomed large for the audience of the Morgan Old Testament. Ruth's sexuality, finely balanced between her exemplary chastity and the imperative of reproduction, is negotiated by the introduction of the romance element, while her fertility is celebrated both metaphorically and literally in pictures that overflow with barley, with seed, and ultimately with joy at the birth of a son.

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<sup>39</sup> The weight of consensus leans toward Louis. See Weiss, "Portraying the Past, Illuminating the Present: the Art of the Morgan Library Picture Bible," *The Book of Kings*, 15-18. However, Alison Stones has argued powerfully for a northern French attribution and a link to the patronage of Robert II of Artois: "Questions of Style and Provenance in the Morgan Picture Bible," *Between the Picture and the Word: Manuscript Studies from the Index of Christian Art*, ed. Colum Hourihane (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 2005), 112-21.

<sup>40</sup> Sabine Geldsetzer, *Frauen auf Kreuzzügen 1096-1291* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003).



Fig. 1: *Rape of the Virgins of Shiloh, Ruth Cleaves to Naomi*. The Morgan Old Testament Picture Book (The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.638, fol. 17)





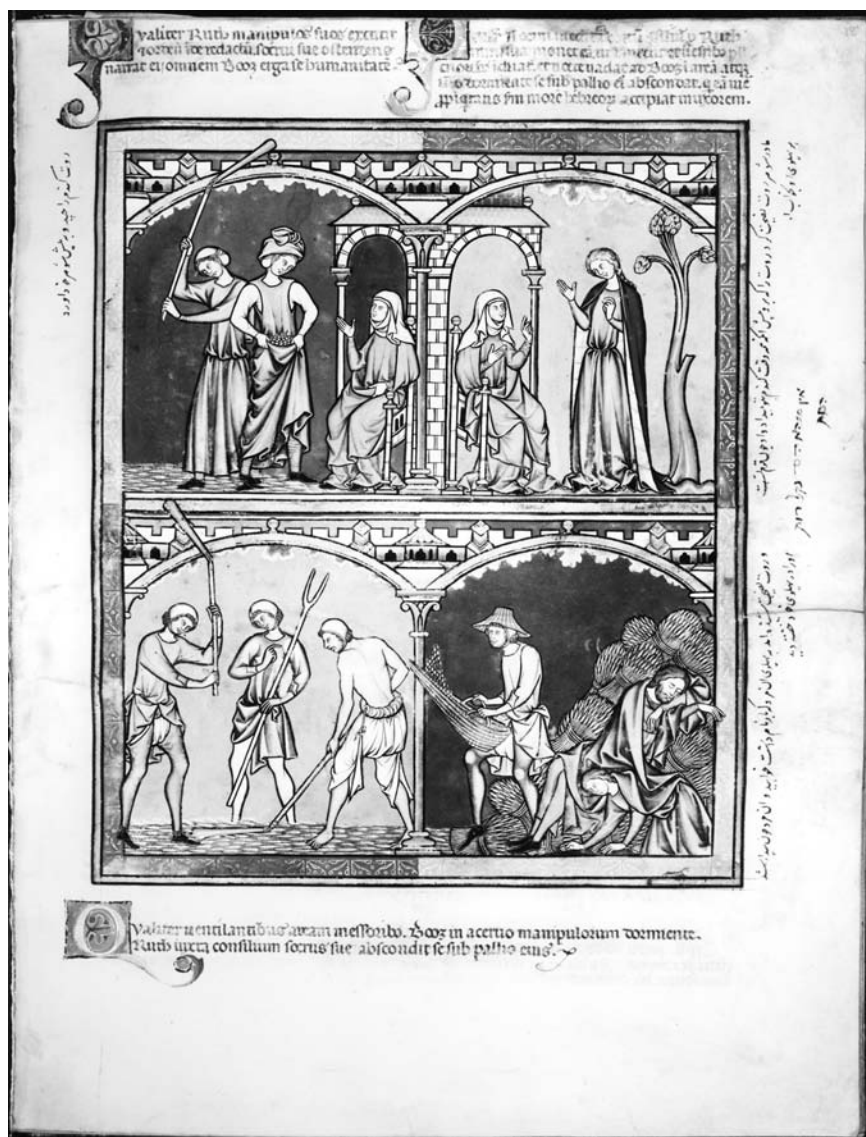


Fig. 3: *Ruth threshes and presents barley to Naomi, Naomi instructs Ruth, Ruth creeps under the cloak of the sleeping Boaz.* The Morgan Old Testament Picture Book (The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.638, fol. 18)



Fig. 4: Boaz gives Ruth a measure of barley, Ruth presents the barley to Naomi, Boaz requests the kinsman to yield his claim to Ruth. The Morgan Old Testament Picture Book (The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.638, fol. 18v)



Fig. 5: *The Birth of Obed, Hannah and Penninah follow Eli to the tabernacle.*  
 The Morgan Old Testament Picture Book (The Pierpont Morgan Library,  
 New York. MS M.638, fol. 19)



Fig. 6: *Vièrge debout*, south portal, west façade, Amiens Cathedral, ca. 1225-40.  
(Photo: Mary Ann Sullivan)



Fig. 7: *The Chess Game*, ivory mirror case, France, ca. 1330  
(© Victoria and Albert Museum, London)



Fig. 8: *Gideon is called and makes a sacrifice*. The Morgan Old Testament Picture Book (The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.638, fol. 12v)



Fig. 9: *Joseph distributes grain to his brethren, who turn to leave.* The Morgan Old Testament Picture Book (The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MS M.638, fol. 6)





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## The Rape of Men and other “Lessons” about Sex in the *Libro de buen amor*

“Literary sources may be among the most useful sources for the history of sexuality because . . . imaginative literature gives us the most vivid examples of actual medieval life—or so it seems. They may be no more accurate representations of how medieval people actually lived than pulp fiction is of the way people live today. Literary representations of human behavior do not reflect lived experience in any simple way—or even, necessarily, in any complex way. In fact, they may have influenced experience—by affecting how people understood and interpreted it—more than they reflect it, and they certainly influence how we reconstruct medieval experience.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Libro de buen amor*, or *Book of Good Love*, is probably the most widely-read book of the medieval Spanish corpus and in many ways one of the most enigmatic. We know very little about the work’s author, the self-identified, Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita, who narrates in first person a series of misadventures in love.<sup>2</sup> From the

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 10.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent overview of critical thought about the “pseudo-autobiographical” and episodic structure of the *Libro de buen amor*, see Louise M. Haywood, “Juan Ruiz and the *Libro de Buen Amor*: Contexts and Milieu,” *A Companion to the Libro de Buen Amor*, ed. Louise M. Haywood and Louise O. Vasvári. Colección Tàmesis. Serie A: Monografías, 209 (Woodbridge, U.K., and Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2004), 21–38. Haywood reviews the theories of Castro’s and Lida de

outset the identity of author and protagonist is blurred since the latter also refers to himself as an Archpriest, thus creating a work in which the narrator is a kind of alter-ego for its creator. In his prologue, moreover, Juan Ruiz is unapologetically ambiguous about his purpose in writing the book. While at first insisting that his work is to lead his audience to embrace *Buen Amor*, or Good Love, that is the Love of God, and to reject *Loco Amor* or Crazy Love, that is worldly or carnal love,<sup>3</sup> he soon contradicts himself and opens the book to other possible interpretations.<sup>4</sup> Our author asserts that man can only choose to follow the path of divine love when he is fully informed about its opposite, that is, profane desire or lust. So firmly with tongue in cheek Juan Ruiz admits that his book can be equally valuable both as a guide to avoid as well as to practice *loco amor*:

por que es umanal cosa el pecar, si algunos, lo que non los conssejo, quisieren usar del loco amor, aquí fallarán algunas maneras para ello. E ansí este mi libro a todo omne o muger, al cuerdo e al non cuerdo, al que entendiere el bien e escogiere salvaçión e obrare bien, amando a Dios; otrosí al que quisiere el amor loco; en la carrera que andudiere, puede cada uno bien dezir: Intellectum tibi dabo . . . .<sup>5</sup>

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Malkiel's about the influence of the Hispano-Hebraic *maqāmāt* as a model for the *Libro*'s narrative structure, Gybbon-Monypenny's about the connection with the Pan-European genre of erotic pseudo-autobiography, Rico's and Morros' linkage with the elegiac *comoedia* or Latin versified tale, and Michalski's, Gerli's, and Brownlees's conclusion about the role of St. Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions* on the genesis of the *Libro de buen amor*. Other important studies include Alfonso Rey's "Juan Ruiz, don Melón de la Huerta y el yo poético medieval" in the *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 56 (1979): 103–16, and Francisco Rico's "Sobre el origen de la autobiografía en el *Libro de buen amor*," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 4 (1967): 301–25. On this question, see also Chapter two of Laurence de Looze's *Pseudo-Autobiography in the Fourteenth Century: Juan Ruiz, Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Geoffrey Chaucer* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997). De Looze succinctly concludes: "Juan Ruiz as a stable figure continues to elude us, and to this day there is debate as to whether a Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita, really existed. The author seems to be discovered and then lost again with each new article on the subject in the journal *La Corónica*: for each essay that argues for his historical existence, there is one that argues against" (45).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the terms *buen amor* and *loco amor*, see Brian Dutton, "Buen amor: Its Meaning and Uses in Some Medieval Texts," *Libro de buen amor Studies*, ed. G. B. Gybbon-Monypenny. Colección Támesis. Série A: Monografías, 12 (London: Tamesis, 1970), 95–121.

<sup>4</sup> Louise O. Vasvári, following Bakhtin, considers the *Libro de buen amor* "a perfect example of the polyphonic text, right from its key words, *buen amor*, which can function—alternately or simultaneously—in religious discourse (as the love of God or as Augustinian *caritas*), in the discourse of eroticism, as love, courtly or base . . ." ("The Novelness of the *Libro de Buen Amor*," *A Companion to the Libro de Buen Amor*, ed. Louise M. Haywood and Louise O. Vasvári. Colección Támesis. Série A: Monografías, 209 (Woodbridge, U.K., and Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2004), 165–81; here 170. De Looze addresses the question of whether *buen amor* should be construed as either *caritas* or *cupiditas* by concluding that "we have not an either/or question of choosing between two kinds of love but rather a matter of duality, of both/and" (*Pseudo-Autobiography in the Fourteenth Century*, 45).

<sup>5</sup> All quotes are from the *Libro de buen amor* are from the edition of G. B. Gybbon-Monypenny.

[. . . inasmuch as it is human to sin, if anyone should wish (which I do not advise) to have a taste of this worldly love, here they will find some models for doing so. And so this book of mine, to every man or woman, to the prudent and the imprudent, to whomever would understand the good and elect salvation and do good works in the love of God, and also to whomever may desire foolish worldly love—whichever path he may wish to walk—this book can say truly to each one: I will give thee understanding].<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the Archpriest reminds us, that everyone, including himself, is a sinner and since all will, at one time or another fall prey to the sin of lustful desire, readers can profit from reading about the author's experiences with carnal love:

E yo como soy omne, commo otro, pecador, / ove de las mugeres a las vezes grand amor. / Provar omne las cosas non es por ende peor, / e saber bien e mal e usar lo mejor (vv. 76a–d).

[And I, since I'm a man, a sinner, just as other men, / Felt often great desire for women stirring deep within. / To test both this and that result is not the worst of things, / Nor to know both good and bad, if one will use the better then].<sup>7</sup>

Scholars have debated for decades the "correct" interpretation of Juan Ruiz's *Libro de buen amor*. Does it actually advocate moral or immoral behavior? How do we come to grips with the text's seeming ambiguity and overt contradictions? And what of the author's blatant stance as an unreliable narrator: "Do coydares que [el libro] miente, dize mayor verdat; / En las coplas puntadas yaze la falssedat" (vv. 69ab; "Where you suspect it lies, its truth grows stronger all the while. / The falsehoods lie in stanzas colorful to best beguile;" 43). Rather than attempting to answer these questions outright, John Dagenais has proposed a new way of approaching the *Libro de buen amor*. In his groundbreaking work *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de buen amor*, Dagenais challenges us to move beyond the idea of the *LBA* as fixed artifact, the product of an author who is solely responsible for its shape and meaning. Rather he proposes that we approach the *LBA* as its medieval readers would. For Juan Ruiz's contemporaries reading (or listening to) the book was an act of "demonstrative rhetoric that reached out and grabbed the reader, involved him or her in praise and blame, in

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Clásicos Castalia, 161 (Madrid: Castalia, 1988), 110.

<sup>6</sup> Translation by Saralyn R. Daly in *The Book of True Love: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. Anthony N. Zahareas (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 27. All quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are from this edition.

<sup>7</sup> *The Book of True Love*, 43. For a more playful translation, see Mark Singleton, trans., *The Book of the Archpriest of Hita (Libro de Buen Amor)* (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1975): "Now, sins I often perpetrate—a human predilection! / And often have I shown for girls sincere and deep affection. / But wicked in itself 'tis not to look into a matter, / If—having tasted good and bad—you savor not the latter" (10).

judgments about effective and ineffective human behavior. [It] engaged the reader, not so much in the unraveling of meaning as in a series of ethical meditations and of personal ethical choices."<sup>8</sup>

If we keep in mind that medieval people did not hold our peculiar reverence for the text as repository of meaning but rather as part of a process of continuously examining and revising one's life in order to confront "how one should behave with a view to greater happiness in this world and the next,"<sup>9</sup> we can begin to move toward a more nuanced evaluation of the book especially in its treatment of sexual behaviors and practices.

Since the Archpriest admits that his book may be used as a manual to help one engage in *loco amor* (as well as one on how to avoid it), his choice to narrate, in first person, a series of misadventures in love has direct implications about what and how medieval audiences "read" about sexual behavior. The fact that the narrator is largely unsuccessful in his dealings with the opposite sex is, of course, humorous, and at least some of the work's contemporary readers/listeners would have recognized Juan Ruiz's alter ego as a parody of the courtly lover. They would probably also have recognized as parodies his long allegorical debates with Don Amor and Doña Venus about the nature of love. But other sections of the book are less transparent, as for example his encounters with the wild women of the mountains—the *serranas*. These sections of the book are blatant and unabashed parodies of the *pastourelles* which presented fanciful visions of idyllic encounters with peasant girls.<sup>10</sup> In this section of the book, which comprises some 90 strophes, the Archpriest is sexually molested and physically mistreated at the hands of four grotesque *serranas*.

This depiction of the *serranas* owes much to the medieval folklore and literary portrayals of wild men and women who lived in the forests or other isolated areas. According to Roger Bartra, "The wild man was the pagan symbol of the Middle Ages most openly linked to sexual pleasure, erotic passion, and carnal love."<sup>11</sup> As

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<sup>8</sup> John Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de buen amor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), xvii.

<sup>9</sup> Dagenais, *The Ethics of Reading* . . . , xvii.

<sup>10</sup> The satiric nature of these scenes has occasioned considerable critical attention and, while these studies are valuable, I, in part, agree with Steven Kirby, who observes that such studies "do not go very far toward answering . . . the relationship of this bizarre sequence to the *Libro de buen amor* as a whole." Kirby, "Juan Ruiz's *Serranas*: The Archpriest-Pilgrim and Medieval Wild Women," *Hispanic Studies in Honor of Alan D. Deyermond: A North American Tribute*, ed. John S. Miletich (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1986), 151–69; here 151. On this point, see also Wendi Casillas, "El significado arquetípico de las serranas en el *Libro de buen amor*," *La Corónica* 27,1 (1998): 81–98; here 89: "Las serranillas de Juan Ruiz son parodia de la *pastourelle*, la que a su vez se originó como parodia de la frialdad del amor cortés aristocrático y las reglas de la corte."

<sup>11</sup> Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, trans. Carl T. Berrisford (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 100.

such they represent a form of *loco amor* which Juan Ruiz will experience and, by experiencing it, will learn to choose the opposite. The fact that the Archpriest interacts with four different *serranas*, or wild women, before he learns his lesson is not without comic effect. At the same time he presents these encounters as part of what Dagenais calls lessons in "practical wisdom" about the use and abuse of human sexual conduct. Wendi Casillas analyzes the episodes of the *serranas* in terms of a quest-myth in which "las serranas son arquetipos femeninos del mundo diabólico característico de la comedia irónica."<sup>12</sup>

The four encounters with the mountain girls, or *serranas*, are, in fact, four variations of a theme. Our protagonist encounters the first *serrana* (who is also called a *vaqueriza*, or cow-girl), when he becomes lost in the mountains during a terrible snow storm. She identifies herself as La Chata (or Pug-Nosed)<sup>13</sup> and tells him that she guards this pass in the mountains and that he must pay her a toll in order to proceed. He promises her jewels (which he does not possess) if she will give him shelter. La Chata agrees to give him food and shelter in exchange for the promised jewels and trinkets but threatens him with her staff if he should not do her bidding.<sup>14</sup> La Chata actually throws her shepherd's crook as well as her sling at him. These objects serve to reinforce the role reversal here between the male "victim" and female aggressor since it is she who wields objects which clearly connote the male phallus and testicles.<sup>15</sup> She then hoists the exhausted traveler onto her shoulders and carries him off to her hut. In fact, she feeds him quite well (with rabbit, partridge, bread, wine, cheese, and milk) but then insists that

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<sup>12</sup> Wendi Casillas, "El significado arquetípico de las serranas . . .," 86.

<sup>13</sup> Concerning the translation of La Chata's name, Louise Vasvári contends that both the Chata and the name of the second *serrana*, Gadea, are related to the Santa Ágata who is the patron of fertility and lactation who, in turn, is a Christianization of *Lou Gat* (Santo Gato). Vasvári points out that during the festivals of Ágata in Spain women have license to attack men, strip them of their clothing, touch their sexual organs, and even throw honey on them ("Peregrinaciones por topografías pornográficas en el *Libro de Buen Amor*," *Actas de VI Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval*. Tomo II. Ed. José Manuel Lucía Megías (Alcalá: Universidad de Alcalá, Servicio de Publicación, 1997), 1563–72; here 1564. James F. Burke also relates La Chata to the Feast of Santa Ágata and points out that "In Zamarramala, a village on a ridge overlooking Segovia, this feast is particularly significant since it is marked by a series of events in which roles are reversed and women 'ágatas' take power for a period of week" (*Desire Against the Law: The Juxtaposition of Contraries in Early Medieval Spanish Literature*. *Figurae* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], 194).

<sup>14</sup> To comment on the phallic nature of the *serrana's* staff hardly seems necessary. However, note that in the narrator's encounter with the second mountain woman, Gadea, she not only threatens but actually strikes him with a mighty blow using her sturdy staff. See the similar metaphoric imagery used by Jean de Meun at the conclusion of the *Roman de la rose*; cf. the discussion of this scene by Albrecht Classen in the Introduction to this volume, 37–44.

<sup>15</sup> Burke, *Desire Against the Law*, 183–84, points out that the *serrana* episodes are offer numerous allusions to piercing (penetrations) as well as castration.

"faremos la lucha" (v.969g; "we'll have a nice bout;"247). Now warm and with his belly full, the Archpriest finds himself inclined to cooperate and, even though she does physically overpower him, he takes pride in the fact that he held up his part of the bargain: "Por la muñeca me priso, / ove de fazer quanto quiso; / creo que fiz buen barato" (vv. 971efg; "And she seized my writs, undaunted, / I had to do just what she wanted. I got off pretty cheap, I guess!" 249). As is his wont, Juan Ruiz leaves the question as to whether the traveler is actually raped delightfully ambiguous. The rape of men formed part of the lore associated with wild women, as Bartra observes: "Men were not excluded from the danger of rape: there also existed frightful wild women whose uncontrollable sexual impulses threatened medieval knights."<sup>16</sup> While our Archpriest is certainly no knight, he cleverly adapts the motif of the beastly woman who overcomes her unsuspecting victim. Nonetheless, the physically unattractive and brawny La Chata, who the Archpriest describes as "gaha rroín, heda" (v. 961b; "The ugly pock-marked creature;" 245), does save the weary traveler who apparently goes on his way none the worse for wear.<sup>17</sup>

In the second encounter with a mountain girl, Juan Ruiz alludes to his previous adventure with La Chata. In this episode the Archpriest begins his journey in Segovia but assures us that he has not gone there to buy the promised jewels for La Chata—a vow he never intended to keep.<sup>18</sup> On his way home, the Archpriest

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<sup>16</sup> *Wild Men in the Looking Glass*, 101. Bartra cites a thirteenth-century German-Bavarian poem (*Wolfdietrich*) which "relates how Raue [sic] Else, a wild and hairy woman, besieges Wolfdietrich, as he mounts guard beside a fire while his companions sleep" (101).

<sup>17</sup> In analyzing this first of the four encounters with women in the mountains, R. B. Tate, "Adventures in the sierra," *Libro de buen amor Studies*, 219–29; here 221. concludes that "The burlesque of the pastoral meeting is not exceptional, with its animal view of sexuality, but the specific point of the lyric is that despite inconvenience and forced submission, the protagonist gains at least as much as he loses in self respect."

<sup>18</sup> In keeping with the extended metaphor of these journeys in the mountains as part of pilgrimage, Burke, *Desire against the Law*, 190–91, analyzes both the Archpriest's destination, i.e. Segovia, which he sees as a "not a proper object of true pilgrimage" as well as the time of year (March 3) on which he sets off on his journey. Since March 3 could fall within either Carnival or Lent, Burke sees the trip to Segovia as part of the Archpriest's "attempt to achieve a private carnival for himself . . . , another aspect of this enduring demand for personal license." However, Kirby, in his article "Juan Ruiz's *Serranas*: The Archpriest-Pilgrim and Medieval Wild Women," argues very convincingly that episodes in the *Libro* form part of a pilgrimage narrative, most probably a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. His conclusions are based on the internal evidence of sequencing in the *Libro*. The *serrana* narratives immediately follow the incident with Doña Endrina (Lady Plum) when our protagonist, now thinly disguised as Don Melon de la Huerta (Sir Melon of the Garden), experienced one of his few successful seductions. If the adventures in the mountains are indeed part of the experience of pilgrimage, we can assume that the pilgrimage is undertaken as penance for, yet again, having fallen victim to *loco amor*. Also, following the *serrana* episodes, there is a long, allegorical struggle between the forces of Lady Lent and Lord Flesh, which ultimately ends in the triumph of the latter, thus affirming that, despite the protagonist's

tells us that he decides to take a different route through the mountains precisely in order to avoid running into the first *serrana* again. By trying to take an alternate route through the mountains, the Archpriest again becomes lost and, upon encountering another mountain girl, Gadea, who is guarding the path, he defaults to the strategy that had won him shelter and directions from La Chata. He boldly announces to Gadea: "morar me he con vusco o mostrad me la carrera." (v.975d; "I'll have to rest with you, unless you show me the road;" 251). Gadea's reaction is brusque and she warns him not to invite himself so boldly to her hospitality and help:

Semejas me, diz, sandío, que así te conbidas: / non te llegues a mí, ante te lo comidas;  
/ si non, yo te faré que mi cayada midas: / si en lleno te cojo, bien tarde la olvidas (vv.  
976abcd).

[I think you're pretty stupid to invite yourself like this. / And don't come closer till you measure what a job you'll get. / Otherwise, I'll take your measure with the length of my sheepcrook; / And if I catch you with it, it's not soon that you'll forget; 251].

Just as she had threatened, Gadea smacks him roundly with her herding staff and hauls him off to her cabin where she demands sex from him. Again the staff, or *cayada*, carries the same erotic/phallic symbolism as it had in his encounter with La Chata.<sup>19</sup> Gadea also insults him, calling him *envernizo* which implies weakness and without sexual warmth.<sup>20</sup> Cold and hungry as he is, he tells her that he can not perform well on an empty stomach: "que ayuno e arreçido, non podría solazar; / si ante non comiese, non podría bien jugar." (v. 982c; "If I don't eat a little first, I can't wrestle in love;" 253). He nonetheless manages to pay for what he calls a "small snack" but he certainly doesn't enjoy it. Gadea asks him to stay longer now that her passions are fully aroused but he refuses and she finally shows him the path to the next village but not before she threatens literally to skin him alive: "Yot mostraré, si non ablandas, / cómmo se pella el erizo, / sin agua e sin rroçío" (vv. 992ghi; "Warm up, or else I'll show you how / The hedgehog rolls in a ball like wax / Without any rain, frost, or dew;" 255). In Vasvári's opinion in the phrase *como se pella el erizo, erizo* (i.e., the hedgehog rolled into a ball) has the same sexual

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efforts of sincere repentance, he will always be pulled back to the world of lust, greed, and deceit which is so masterfully captured in the tales about the *serranas*.

<sup>19</sup> In his discussion of sexual behavior of the wild man, Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass*, 104, states that "The belief that sexual desire was independent from will was considered by theology as a sequel to original sin: the body could no longer be dominated by reason or will, which the uncontrolled erection of the penis, that ominous symptom of sin according to Augustine, amply showed."

<sup>20</sup> Louise Vasvári, "Peregrinaciones por topografías pornográficas en el *Libro de Buen Amor*" in *Actas de VI Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Hipánica de Literatura Medieval*. Tomo II. Ed. José Manuel Lucía Megías (Alcalá: Universidad de Alcalá, Servicio de Publicación, 1997), 1563–72; here 1570.



connotation as *nueces* (nuts) and thus her threat is actually to “skin his nuts alive”, i.e. roast his nuts over an open fire.<sup>21</sup> While again sex has been the toll demanded by the *serrana*, this second encounter has been totally unpleasant and the Archpriest escapes from Gadea before suffering permanent damage.

We arrive now at the encounter with a third mountain girl who the Archpriest describes as “lerda” or slow-witted which occurs near a place called Cornejo, which Vasvári identifies as a word play on *cornudo*, and thus by extension, “coward and impotent.”<sup>22</sup> He comes across this *serrana* as she is cutting down a tree—a thinly veiled allusion to the fact that he is about to play the castrated male to a more aggressive female partner.<sup>23</sup> The name of this *serrana* is Mengua Lloriente, which roughly translates as dull-witted and weepy. Mengua however is out for more than just sex and she immediately proposes marriage to our traveler whom she believes to be a “pastor.”<sup>24</sup> She further demands that he give her a list of his qualifications for the job of a good husband. The boastful Archpriest, in reply, launches into a long litany of his skills as a mountain man. De Lope, Dagenais, and Vasvári are among the critics who have pointed out the obscene *double entendres* inherent in the narrator’s enumeration of his special abilities.<sup>25</sup> A stunning example is the following:

Sé muy bien tornear vacas, / e domar bravo novillo; / sé maçar e fazer natas, / e fazer el odrezillo; / bien sé guitar las abarcas, / e tañer el caramillo, / e cavalgar bravo portillo (vv. 1000abcdefg).

<sup>21</sup> “Peregrinaciones . . .,” 1570. Gybbon-Monypenny, in his edition, cites Corominas who interprets these lines as “como se apelotona el erizo (a sentirse amenazado)” and Morreale who, like Vasvári interprets “erizo” as “erizo de la castaña,” understands these lines as “que el erizo [de la castaña] se pela aun ‘sin aqua y sin rocío . . . a fuerza de pisotones y palos”, 317.

<sup>22</sup> “Peregrinaciones . . .,” 1570.

<sup>23</sup> On this point see Burke, *Desire against the Law*, 184. See also Dietrich of the Glezze’s tale “The Belt” (late thirteenth century), included in *Erotic Tales of Medieval Germany*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, vol. 328, MRTS Texts for Teaching, vol. 3, trans. Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 19–28. In this tale, the wife, disguised as a knight, demonstrates superior prowess in feats of knighthood, including defeating a Briton knight whom no other has been able to challenge successfully. When she demands sex of her husband (who does not know she is a woman and his wife), he agrees to enter a homosexual encounter, thus demonstrating the female’s complete subjugation of the male. Only then does she reveal her true gender and her identity as his wife.

<sup>24</sup> Kirby, “Juan Ruiz’s *Serranas*,” 159, calls the identification of the traveler as a pastor “a deliciously ambiguous misunderstanding,” since the word can quite literally mean shepherd or can also convey the ecclesiastical meaning of pastor or priest. For more on the anti-clerical criticism in the *Libro de buen amor* see Otis Green’s “Medieval Laughter: The Book of Good Love” in his *Spain and the Western Tradition: The Castilian Mind in Literature from ‘El Cid’ to Calderón*. Vol. 1 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 27–71.

<sup>25</sup> See also the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christop.

[I know just how to bulldog cattle, / And break in wild young bulls as well; / And I can churn and make whipped cream, / At making wine bags I excel, / And I can sew good peasant sandals, / Play on the flute a bagatelle / And ride a small brown colt like hell; 257].<sup>26</sup>

The references to riding and dominating animals, of course, connote the sexual act while the "natas" reference coupled to the verb "amasar" imply both thrusting and ejaculation. The reference to the "odresillo" (small wineskin) is directly related to the scrotum whereas playing the "caramillo" implies the penis.<sup>27</sup> Of course, after the last two episodes in which he was certainly not the sexual aggressor, this boasting takes on a particularly ludicrous tone. And, on a more literal level, this braggadocio about his frontier survival skills and talents on the part of the hapless narrator who had twice before found himself lost and exposed in the mountains is doubly pretentious. Mengua, in turn, catalogues an extensive list of clothing, jewelry, and trinkets she will require as marriage gifts. This meeting with the third *serrana*, however, does not lead to a sexual encounter; instead it culminates in lengthy, colorful monologues by both the Archpriest and Mengua.

The preceding three episodes lead up to the longest and most elaborate account of the Archpriest's meeting with the fourth *serrana* known as Alda. Once again, as in his first adventure in the mountains, the traveler finds himself lost in a cold and icy storm. The woman he now encounters in his wanderings is nothing less than a hideous beast, a monster or "vestiglo" (v. 1008b). The poet gives full rein to his poetic powers of description giving us all the gruesome details of her appearance: she is huge and hairy with ears like a donkey, a mouth like a big, ferocious dog, ankles the size of year-old cow, with a hoarse and unpleasant voice, and breasts so large and pendulous that she can sling them over her shoulder.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In the introduction to this volume, see Albrecht Classen's analysis of Oswald von Wolkenstein's songs with their similarly unabashed erotic symbolism, especially in "Ain graserin," discussed on p. 46–47. See also the contribution to this volume by Rasma Lazda-Cazers.

<sup>27</sup> The Archpriest alludes to playing musical instruments a number of times throughout the *Libro*. Perhaps the most noteworthy is found at the end of the dispute between the Greeks and the Romans: "De todos instrumentos yo, libro, só pariente: / bien o mal, qual puntares, tal te dirá ciertamente. / Qual tú dezir quisieres, y faz punto, y, ten te; / si me punter sopieres, sienpre me avrás en miente." (vv. 70abcd; "A relative am I, the book, to instruments you'll find. / How so you tune me, well or badly, I'll resound in kind, / Strike notes and hold them, gay or sad, just as your heart's inclined: / If you know how to play, you'll always have me in mind;" 43). As Burke, *Desire against the Law*, 175, points out, "the implication is that one is free to create on this musical instrument [i.e., the book] whatever tune he may wish. The reader may 'play' with the material recorded in the book, to understand the poet's experiences as an example for either good or bad." The imagery of the small sack as well as the playing of musical instruments as metaphors for male genitalia and the sex act, respectively, are also evident in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*. See Albrecht Classen's discussion in the Introduction to this volume, pp. 41–44.

<sup>28</sup> Tate sees the description of Alda "as a photographic negative of the ideal woman described at

The Archpriest initially addresses the monstrous Alda calling her “*fermosa, loçana / e bien colorada*” (vv. 1024cd; “Beautiful, sprightly and with rosy-cheeked”).<sup>29</sup> For Kirby the apparent contraction in calling this beastly woman “*fermosa*” is actually a ploy to score points for humor with the audience as well as to try to win favor from this large and imposing adversary.<sup>30</sup> For Dagenais, the contrasting descriptions hold a more subtle subplot. Rather than the ironic interpretation posited by Kirby and others, Dagenais develops de Lope’s idea that the Archpriest’s descriptions of Alda is a “reflection of folklore themes of the *serranas* as capable of disguising themselves as beautiful young women.”<sup>31</sup> He relates the Archpriest’s dual description of Alda—hideous/beautiful—to a number of examples, including Chaucer’s *The Wife of Bath’s* tale and Dante’s *femmina balba* scene from *Purgatorio* 19, of “graphic descriptions of the grotesque hidden nature of the love object . . .”<sup>32</sup> And he goes on to ask: “Is . . . Juan Ruiz suggesting in his double, contradictory portrayal of the *serrana* as grotesque and ‘*fermosa*’ the same sort of contrast between the lover’s imagination and reality . . . ? Is he suggesting, after the manner of the moralists, that the *serrana* is the grotesque

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431–35, 443–45, 448 of Don Amor’s address (“Adventures in the *sierra*,” 224).” Juan Ruiz’s description of Alda also parallels that of the Faengge or Fankke described by Berheimer. This wild woman figure known in the Tyrol and in the Bavarian Alps is “a colossal ogre of great strength and appalling ugliness. Bristly all over, she has a mouth forming a grimace that reaches from ear to ear. Her black, untended hair is interspersed with lichen, and according to a report from Switzerland, she has breasts so long that she can throw them over her shoulders” (Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952], 33.) For a study of how sagging breasts were also related to depiction of native American women, see Bernadette Bucher, *La Sauvage aux seins pendants* (Paris: Hermès, 1977). Also Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass*, 102, contends that in the late Middle Ages, the wild woman, or hag, came to be identified with witches. For more on this association, see Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1998). See also Cundrie in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*, trans. A. T. Hatto (London: Penguin, 1980).

<sup>29</sup>

My translation.

<sup>30</sup>

Kirby, “Juan Ruiz’s *Serranas*,” 160.

<sup>31</sup>

John Dagenais, “*Cantigas d’escarnho* and *serranillas*: The Allegory of Careless Love,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 68,2 (1991): 247–63; here 257: “What is being illustrated here, according to de Lope, in the puzzling contradiction between *cuaderna vía* and lyric sections, is the dual nature of this folkloric character.” Bernheimer elaborates on the semblance of beauty which the wild woman may assume in order to lure her prey into her trap: “the wild woman behaves, when she meets a man, as if she were a volatile transient figure out of a dream. She changes appearance with rapidity, transforming her monstrosity into the semblance of glamorous youth . . . How great the deception is which such creatures practice will be realized when it is considered that, according to widespread tradition, the real wild woman, when undisguised, is distinguished by shrunken flesh and long sagging breasts which are either slung over the shoulder or allowed to drag over the ground” (*Wild Men in the Middle Ages* . . . , 34–35).

<sup>32</sup>

“*Cantias d’escarnho* and *serranillas*: The Allegory of Careless Love,” 258.

reality which lurks behind 'el loco amor del mundo'?"<sup>33</sup> Dagenais's evidence leads him to answer both queries in the affirmative.

Alda tells the narrator, whom she addresses as "fidalgo," to be on his way but the traveler insists and she promises him shelter for a *soldada*, i.e., monetary payment (v. 1027e). He promises her money and in return he receives coarse bread, bad wine, and salted meat—a sharp contrast to the succulent repast he had enjoyed with the first *serrana*. Alda tells him that if he wishes a good dinner and soft bed he must first bring her gifts, and her inventory of desired objects is not unlike that demanded by Mengua Llorente as part of her dowry. In fact, if the Archpriest can deliver what she asks she even offers to marry him<sup>34</sup> and he solemnly promises to bring her what she demands. But Alda is no dull-witted Mengua and the Archpriest will get nothing more from her until she sees the merchandise: "Do non ay moneda / non ay merchandía . . . / e yo non me pago / del que nom da algo,/ nin le do la posada" (vv. 1040bc and vv. 1041cde; "When there's no cash to spend, / There's no sale to be made . . . / I give credit to none / Who gives nothing but fun, / And I don't let him stay;" 269). This last of the *serrana* songs ends on a cynical note placed in the mouth of this monstrous *serrana*: "Nunca de omenaje / pagan ostalaje; / por dineros faze / omne quanto plaze, / cosa es provada" (vv. 1042 cde; "For hard cash men may do / What they take a mind to. / That's a proved fact, I say!" 271).

Juan Ruiz narrates, in the first person, these adventures in which he finds himself abused physically or verbally, and, in at least two of the encounters forced into sex against his will, by wild and hideous women who reside in isolated mountain passes. Beyond these sections of the work as parodies of the courtly love adventures depicted in the *pastourelles* in which young noblemen flirt with dainty and comely shepherdesses, these episodes in the *Libro de buen amor* hold some fascinating clues about medieval sensibilities vis-à-vis sex. The situations are clearly comedic and require that readers dismiss any reasonable questioning of the feasibility of women raping men, but at the same time they may also reveal some of medieval men's real fears about women.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps Juan Ruiz thinks the best way to deal with these fears is humor, in a manner similar to his backhanded treatment of good love, i.e. you must experience first-hand what is bad, carnal and undesirable in order to know how to avoid it. Juan Ruiz presents episodes in

<sup>33</sup> *The Ethics of Reading in Manuscript Culture: Glossing the Libro de buen amor*, 258.

<sup>34</sup> This episode is clearly a message against marriage since, in the midst of the detailed description of the hideous Alda, the narrator inserts the line: "los que quieren casar se aquí non sea sordos" ("You men who burn to marry, don't turn deaf ears . . .;" 261).

<sup>35</sup> On this point, see Helen Rodnite Lemay's article, "Some Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Lectures on Female Sexuality," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 1, 4 (1978): 301–400; here 392: "... according to theological tradition, woman is evil. By trickery and cunning she has led men astray; she is a harmful creature to be shunned lest she cause further damage."

which he is humiliated by repulsive women as a warning and perhaps, too, as carnivalesque criticism of violent sexual aggression. Jacqueline Murray, in an article entitled "Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages," claims that "male sexual violence [against women] was a common problem across medieval Europe. Indeed, the picture of life on the streets of the average medieval town suggests that male sexuality was omnipresent and somewhat threatening."<sup>36</sup> Since the Archpriest's encounters with the mountain girls occur in very isolated rural settings, in contrast to the urban world of male sexual aggression about which Murray speaks, the wilderness becomes not a *locus amoenus* but rather a dangerous place where men may be emasculated and abused by women.

The *serranas* thus manifest not only male fears about the sexual aggressiveness of women but also serve as what Dagenais calls lessons in "practical wisdom." For a society which perceived male sexual aggression and imposition as a norm, the *Libro de buen amor* reminds men that they are vulnerable, too. The *serranas* constitute an alternative, matriarchal society in which women not only control the choice of sexual partner but may even force their sexual attentions on unwilling male victims.<sup>37</sup> Karras reminds us that "A woman who played a masculine role in sex, or a man who played a feminine role, did transgress, but they did not thereby become a member of the opposite . . . gender."<sup>38</sup> Thus as the man-victim, the Archpriest, without sacrificing the inherently comic tone of these episodes, portrays these wild women of the mountains as one of his many amorous challenges in which he is ultimately defeated. And while one might argue that the *serranas* merely served to reinforce a patriarchal view of woman as sexual temptress, their portrayal as physically powerful and unattractive reinforces the dangers of *loco amor*.

Even though the Archpriest fully admits that he cannot resist women:

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<sup>36</sup> "Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York and London: Garland, 1996), 123–52; here 135.

<sup>37</sup> See Albrecht Classen's treatment of the seduction by Lady Bercilak on Gawain in the Middle English, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the Introduction to this volume, especially 32–37. Editor's Note: See also Brunhild's subjugation of her newly-wed husband Gunther in the *Nibelungenlied* (ca. 1200); she simply hangs him on a nail during the first wedding night because she does not trust him in his claim that he won the competition for her hand and now, in this intimate situation, proves to him that he is, indeed, no match for her. However, she is crushed the second night by Gunther's friend Siegfried, who had already won over Brunhild during the competitions with the help of his magical cape and his own heroic strength. *The Nibelungenlied*. A New Translation by A. T. Hatto (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1965).

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 5.

E yo como soy omne como otro picador, / ove de las mugeres a las vezes grand amor;  
/ provar omne las coasa non es por ende peor, / e saber bien e mal, / e usar lo major"  
(vv. 76abcd)

[And I, since I'm a man, as inner just as other men, / Felt often great desire for women  
stirring deep within. / To test both this and that result is not the worst of things, / Nor  
to know both good and bad, if one will use the better then; 43],

his encounter with the *serranas*, at least momentarily, lead him back to the path to the *buen amor*. Once he has escaped the wild women of the mountains he continues his pilgrimage to Santa María de Vado where he prays to God for forgiveness.<sup>39</sup> He has learned that man is not always the pursuer and that women may take the lead in game of *loco amor*. One of his sources, Ovid, had warned him about women's lusty nature—"A heifer amid lush pastures lows to a bull, a mare whinnies at stallions, but our male libido's milder"<sup>40</sup>—but he is powerless in face of these strong women in his weakened state. He is probably regretting his admonition to try all things in order to know the good from the bad. If his encounters with the *serranas* serve as a kind of penance for the Archpriest's unbridled pursuit of women, they also reflect "a deep-seated apprehension about, or inferiority complex about, the female capacity for extended sexual activity."<sup>41</sup> The Archpriest as victim, while certainly comical, is also a warning to men about their own vulnerability vis-à-vis women.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "E yo, desde que salí de todo aqueste roído, / torné rogar a Dios que no me diese a olvido" (vv. 1043cd; "And I, when I got out of all these scuffles I' begun / Once more prayed God that he not cast me in oblivion;" 271)

<sup>40</sup> *The Art of Love*, I as quoted in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 18.

<sup>41</sup> Blamires, intro., *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> On this point, Wendi Casillas observes, "las serranas representan un meandro pecaminoso del Arcipreste, quien relata su experiencia, una extensión de hilo a lo largo del laberinto de loco amor, para desviar lectores del mismo error" ("El significado arquetípico de las serranas . . . , " 96).



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## Oral Sex in Oswald von Wolkenstein's "Es seusst dort her von orient" (Kl. 20)

We know more about the life of Oswald von Wolkenstein (ca. 1376/1377–1445) than any about any other medieval German poet because he was first and foremost a nobleman whose life is recorded in over 1000 documents.<sup>1</sup> He personally ensured the transmission of his songs and their accompanying musical annotation in two manuscripts (A and B), both of which are preceded by portraits of himself.<sup>2</sup> As an author of the late Middle Ages, Oswald produced a large variety of songs that defy the clear-cut genre boundaries of Middle High German *Minnesang*, and his oeuvre as a whole is thus quite heterogeneous.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Two biographies, by Dieter Kühn and Anton Schwob, appeared in 1977 celebrating Oswald's six-hundredth birthday and reinvigorated the interest in Oswald's oeuvre, the former for a wider audience, and the latter with a focus on historical documents: Dieter Kühn, *Ich Wolkenstein* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1977); Anton Schwob, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: eine Biographie*. 3rd ed. Schriftenreihe des Südtiroler Kulturinstitutes, 4 (1977; Bozen: Athesia, 1989). Schwob has also been editing since 1999 the documents pertaining to Oswald's life. *Die Lebenszeugnisse Oswalds von Wolkenstein: Edition und Kommentar*, ed. Anton Schwob, vols. 1–3 (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 1999 – 2004). For an introduction to the life and work of Oswald, cf. the monograph by Johannes Spicker, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: Die Lieder*. Klassiker-Lektüren, 10 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> A portrait is on the front inside cover of the older manuscript A; the more representative B manuscript contains a detailed portrait (49 cm x 34 cm) which depicts the author's distinguishing features with considerable artistic merit. It remains unknown whether this portrait was actually commissioned by Oswald to be included in the manuscript. For the manuscript tradition, see the authoritative edition *Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, ed. Karl Kurt Klein. 3rd, newly rev. and expanded ed. Hans Moser, Norbert Richard Wolf, and Notburga Wolf. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 55 (1962; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> The popular genre of the dawn song continued to live on in the writings of Boccaccio, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Donne, to name just a few; for the tradition of the German dawn song far into the early-modern period, see Albrecht Classen, "Das deutsche Tagelied in seinen



A third of Oswald's songs speak to aspects of love in one form or another. Sexuality, in particular, figures prominently in many of these love songs; they describe or relate to sex either explicitly or in highly visual metaphors, and his use of onomatopoeia<sup>4</sup> reflects a distinct pleasure in describing sensual love in ever-new language. Oswald's importance in the literary treatment of sexuality in the medieval and early modern period is therefore undisputed.<sup>5</sup> A number of studies have explored aspects of love in Oswald's songs, some addressing sexuality or obscenity in certain songs; however, an analysis of the entire corpus of love songs that focuses on Oswald's use of language and metaphor still remains a desideratum.<sup>6</sup> By exploring the relationship between sexual candor and generic experimentation, this essay suggests that Oswald's contribution to the history of sexuality emerges from his integration of both literary and possibly moral transgression.

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<sup>4</sup> spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Varianten," *Etudes Germaniques* 54 (1999): 173–96.  
 For the use of onomatopoeia in erotic literature both in general and in Oswald's oeuvre, see Albrecht Classen, "Onomatopoesie in der Lyrik von Jehan Vaillant, Oswald von Wolkenstein und Niccolò Soldanieri," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 108 (1989): 357–77.

<sup>5</sup> See also the comments by Albrecht Classen in his Introduction to this volume.

<sup>6</sup> Sieglinde Hartmann, "Oswald von Wolkenstein und Margarethe von Schwangau : ein Liebespaar?" *Paare und Paarungen: Festschrift für Werner Wunderlich zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Ulrich Müller (Stuttgart: Heinz, Akademischer Verlag, 2004), 255–63; here 256, notes that a review of Oswald von Wolkenstein scholarship reveals the lack of a study on Oswald's love lyrics; instead, criticism presents us with singular studies on 'Sabina songs', Margarethe songs, or marital songs and thus focuses on those about whom the songs were composed. ["Überblickt man die Wolkenstein-Forschung, so fällt zunächst auf, dass es keine Untersuchung zu Oswalds Liebeslyrik gibt. Stattdessen verzeichnet die Forschungsgeschichte eine Reihe von Einzelstudien zu 'Sabina-Liedern', 'Margarethe-Liedern' oder 'Eheliedern', also nach genannten und erschlossenen Adressatinnen von Liebesliedern."] Marital love and representations of lover and/or wife have indeed attracted some critical attention while others analyze one or a limited number of songs; cf. Albrecht Classen, "Liebesehe und Ehelieder in den Gedichten Oswald von Wolkenstein," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 5 (1988/89): 445–64. Gaby Herchert's study, 'Acker mir mein bestes Feld'. *Untersuchungen zu erotischen Liederbuchliedern des späten Mittelalters. Mit Wörterbuch und Textsammlung* (Münster and New York: Waxmann, 1996) on erotic songs in the German *Liederbücher* of the late Middle Ages, could serve to some extent as an example for a study on Oswald's love songs. Herchert establishes and presents a systematic classification of erotic songs followed by an analysis of erotic speech and metaphors. Wolfgang von Kossack and Stefanie Stockhorst, "Sexuelles und wie es zu Wort kommt: die Frage nach dem Obszönen in den Liedern Oswalds von Wolkenstein," *Daphnis* 28 (1999): 1–33, follow Herchert's model in order to examine obscenity in Oswald's oeuvre by summarizing different sexual metaphors, based on Wolf-Dieter Stempel, "Mittelalterliche Obszönität als literaturästhetisches Problem," *Die nicht mehr schönen Künste: Grenzphänomene des Ästhetischen*, ed. Hans Robert Jauss. Poetik und Hermeneutik, 3 (Munich: Fink, 1968), 187–205, and Wolfgang Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität. Eine literaturpsychologische Studie über epische Dichtung des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1990).

The focus of this study rests on Oswald von Wolkenstein's "Es seusst dort her von orient" (Kl. 20; "A Wind Blows from the Orient"), beginning with a discussion of the *tagelied*, or dawn song, genre: To what extent is Oswald following the standard inventory of dawn song components in Middle High German *Minnesang*, and how does he challenge the conventions of the genre? After exploring these questions, I will briefly address Oswald's biography to examine how the song might refer to his own life. Then, in a third step, I will interrogate the representation of gender roles through a close reading of Kl. 20. By asking who is saying what, and whose voice is speaking under what circumstances, I will delineate the gender roles that initially appear egalitarian but ultimately are not. My analysis will conclude with a discussion of how Oswald's *Es seusst dort her von orient* illuminates late-medieval society's views of sexuality, and oral sex in particular. What oral sex meant for the Middle Ages, and how the Church responded will be dealt with in this context.

Textual evidence of oral sex is rather scarce, if not non-existent, in medieval literature, and Oswald's discussion of it is therefore all the more intriguing for its rarity.

## 1. Oswald von Wolkenstein and the Tradition of the Middle High German Dawn Song

Middle High German courtly literature was enamored of courtly love, and the "love of courtliness," and most of the time intimate physical relations are implied or veiled rather than explicitly expressed.<sup>7</sup> Within the model of courtly love, the dawn song (Middle High German *tagelied*, Old Provençal *alba*, Old French *aube*) represents an exceptional genre since here the two lovers embrace in the secrecy of the night before their necessary parting at the arrival of dawn. A watchman or a little bird may take the role of an ally warning the two of the encroaching daybreak, with dawn signaling the need for the reluctant lovers to separate in order to avoid discovery by the spies of courtly society. It is in this moment of anguish that joy and sorrow intermingle, and the lovers lament their impending separation by desperately embracing one last time. Then the man leaves his beloved while she expresses her longing to see him again soon. Eroticism rather than sexuality defines the dawn song of the High Middle Ages.<sup>8</sup> In the forbidden

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<sup>7</sup> James A. Schultz's study, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), treats courtly love as a historical construct tied to the courtliness of this love. Hence this love is not an expression of sex.

<sup>8</sup> Gale Sigal underscores this erotic component with the title of her study: *Erotic Dawn-Songs of the Middle Ages: Voicing the Lyric Lady* (Gainesville, Tallahassee, et al.: University Press of Florida,

nature of the tryst, the relationship is adulterous since the lady is married. Because the lovers possess no power to change their predicament, their desire for each other may be fulfilled only in secret.

The descriptions of the bittersweet embrace vary in explicitness. Wolfram von Eschenbach stresses in his *tagelieder* the closeness of the lovers' bodies. In "Den morgenblic bî wahtærs sange erkôs" (no. 1) he describes the final lovemaking as follows:

ir liechten vel, diu slehten,  
 kômen nâher, sus der tac erschein.  
 weindiu ougen — süezer vrouwen kus!  
 sus kunden sî dô vlehten  
 ir munde, ir brüste, ir arme, ir blankiu bein. (vv. 22–26)

[their smooth bright skins  
 came nearer, thus the day shone in.  
 crying eyes — a sweet woman's kiss!  
 thus they could then intertwine  
 their lips, their breasts, their arms, their white thighs.]

Wolfram hints at rather than describes a sexual act. The eroticism of the scene prevails, not the sexual congress of man and woman.<sup>9</sup>

When Oswald von Wolkenstein composes his dawn songs about two hundred years later, he employs the well-established inventory while at the same time experimenting with new variations. With thirteen dawn songs, he is the most prolific medieval practitioner of the genre in the German tradition.<sup>10</sup> Kl. 33 "Ain

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1996). Sigal states: "The medieval erotic dawn-song is a lament for the brevity of human love and a celebration of its irrepressibility." Sigal interprets the medieval dawn song as a new expression of an equal female-male sexual relationship.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also Wolfram's "Ez ist nu tac" (no. 2): "Si hâten beide sich bewegen, / ez enwârt sô nâhen nie gelegen, / des noch diu minne hât den prîs" (vv. 28–31 [correct: 27–29]; They had both agreed so between them / that there was never such a close lying together / of which now yet Love has the renown.) The closeness of the bodies signals here the shared love and desire for each other, and sexuality is subordinate to eroticism. Sigal refers to the "graphic evocation of sexuality" (Sigal, *Erotic Dawn-Songs*, 184) in Wolfram's dawn songs, however it is indeed only an evocation that pales even further in comparison with Oswald's songs. For text and further discussion on Wolfram's dawn songs cf. also Peter Wapnewski, *Die Lyrik Wolframs von Eschenbach: Edition, Kommentar, Interpretation* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1972); Marianna Wynn, "Wolfram's Dawn Songs," *Studien zu Wolfram von Eschenbach: Festschrift Werner Schröder zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Kurt Gärtner and Joachim Heinzle (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989), 549–58. See also Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Titel and the Songs. Texts and Trans. with Introduction, Notes and Comments* by Marion E. Gibbs and Sidney M. Johnson. Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series A, 57 (New York and London: Garland, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> The dawn song itself is well known in Old French, but most popular in the medieval German tradition with about one hundred examples, cf. also Sigal, *Erotic Dawn-Songs*, 5–6.

tunckle farb von occident" exemplifies how Oswald expands the genre. Instead of daybreak, dusk has settled, and now that it is time to go to bed, the singer bemoans how much he misses a woman who may be his wife. The same melancholic tone prevails, but there is no dialogue between the lovers since only one of them is present. The relationship is not secret but most likely exists within the sanction of marriage, and dusk, rather than dawn, elicits the lament of the lonely husband yearning for his loved one to fulfill his sexual needs. It is no longer the unattainability of the relationship that prompts the lament, but rather the fantasizing about the female body, along with the previously experienced satisfaction of male sexual desire, that trigger the singer's erection during the night:

Kom, höchster schatz! Mich schreckt ain ratz mit grossem tratz,  
davon ich dick erwache,  
Die mir kain rü lat spat noch frü. Lieb, dorzü tû,  
damit das bettlin krache! (Kl. 33, 29–33)

[Come, dearest treasure, to me! A 'rat' with a big claw frightens me  
and makes me wake up often, Beloved,  
since you do not grant me any peace either early in the morning or late  
in the evening, help me to make the bed frame creak!]<sup>11</sup>

The rat, a well-known medieval metaphor for the penis, causes the singer to wake suddenly, frightened from a disturbed sleep and wishing he had his "treasure" next to him so that she could satisfy his needs.<sup>12</sup> The erotic yearning for physical intimacy among Wolfram's lovers gives way to the explicit and disturbing sexual desire of the male body in Oswald's *Ain tunckle farb*. The deviations from the *tagelied* from the height of Middle High German literature are numerous, and scholars have disputed whether we may even call Kl. 33 a dawn song.<sup>13</sup> The Mönch von Salzburg was the first to establish this variation, and Oswald might have been influenced by him. Oswald's obvious familiarity with the literary genre in question and his re-configuration of the dawn song inventory have inspired a

<sup>11</sup> Translation by Albrecht Classen, to appear with Palgrave (New York: forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> The woman has white arms and soft hands (*ermlein weiss und hendlin gleiss*, Kl. 33, 5) as is common in *Minnesang*, but functions here solely as a means to satisfy the singer's sexual desire.

<sup>13</sup> Sieglinde Hartmann, "Oswald von Wolkenstein: Traditionen und Innovationen in seiner Lyrik," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 15 (2005): 349–72; here 355, see Kl. 33 in the tradition of the dawn song, but calls it, along with Ulrich Müller, a "Gegentyp des Tagelieds" ("anti-dawn song"), Ulrich Müller, "Die Tagelieder des Oswald von Wolkenstein oder Variationen über ein vorgegebenes Thema. Mit neuer Transkription der Tagelieder des Mönchs von Salzburg von Franz Viktor Spechtler," *Gesammelte Vorträge der 600-Jahrfeier Oswalds von Wolkenstein. Seis am Schlern*, ed. Hans-Dieter Mück and Ulrich Müller. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 206 (Göppingen: Kümmerle 1978), 205–25.

number of studies addressing various aspects of the genre, as in the case of Kl. 33. New genre designations have been suggested, such as *Ehelieder* or marriage songs, when Oswald seemingly refers to the relationship with his wife Margarethe<sup>14</sup> The genre of the dawn song is still known at the time when Oswald writes, but the formerly set boundaries are now open to new interpretation and result in playful experimentation with the form. In contrast to Kl. 33, the song “Es seusst dort her von orient” (Kl. 20) appears to meet the expectations of the genre: at dawn two lovers bemoan their imminent separation. A watchman is present, even though he has neglected to wake the lovers, so that the time for their last embrace is short. It is a dialogue between the woman and the man, their relationship is secret, and they fear detection by the court. If Oswald experiments with or stretches the genre in this case, he does not scramble the inventory of the *tagelied* as in the anti-type of “Ain tunckle farb.” The lovers remain nameless, and do not allow for any personal identification. Nevertheless, Kl. 20 still pushes the boundaries of genre, but in a different way.

## 2. Oswald and Biographical References

Before turning to the textual analysis of Kl. 20, a brief commentary on the biographical references in Oswald’s oeuvre is fitting. The well-documented life of Oswald von Wolkenstein invites speculations on how much his writing is a reflection of his own life. Without this biographical knowledge a discussion about a new genre of *Ehelieder* or marriage songs would likely not have taken place. But even when extensive primary documents are available, the boundary between truth and fiction remains blurry. We know that Oswald von Wolkenstein spent a considerable amount of time at the Council of Constance (1414–1418), and he refers repeatedly to this political summit in his songs. We may gain new insights from his representation of these events,<sup>15</sup> but the distinction in the songs between the

<sup>14</sup> In the first verse of the third strophe of *Ain tunckle farb* (Kl. 33, 25) Oswald mentions the name *liebe Gret* [dear Gret], the shortened form for Oswald’s wife Margarethe von Schwangau. In verse 35 in the same strophe Oswald refers to Gret as his *schöner biil* [beautiful lover] and not as his wife. On the genre of *Ehelieder*, cf. Kerstin Helmkamp, “Genre und Gender: Die ‘Gefangenschafts-’ und ‘Ehelieder’ Oswalds und Wolkenstein,” Ph. D. diss. Berlin 2003, 207, disputes the validity of a new genre since there is not a strong enough pattern to establish such a new genre: “haben allerdings nicht die Kraft, ein Grundmuster auszubilden und eine eigenständige Gattung zu begründen. For Kl. 33, cf. also George Fenwick Jones, “‘Ain tunckle farb’ - Zwar kein ‘tagelied’, - aber doch ein Morgen-Lied. Zu Oswald von Wolkenstein, Kl. 33,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 90, Sonderheft (1971): 142–53.

<sup>15</sup> See the article by Gertrud Blaschitz in this volume on prostitution during the time of the Council of Constance.

text-I, the author-I, and the performer-I are not clear. When he refers to himself by name, we may conclude that text-I and author-I are at least to some degree congruent, but this is not necessarily the case when he uses only the first-person singular pronoun "I."<sup>16</sup> The extent to which the text-I in a love song is either autobiographical or genre-specific remains open, unless the addressee is identifiable. Even if an autobiographical reference is likely, we have to consider genre specific stylization due to poetic license. To forgo all self-references as dictated by genre or as stylized marks the other end of the spectrum. Ulrich Müller poignantly solves the age-old dilemma in an essay on Middle High German *Minnesang*: "Auch die mittelalterliche Liebeslyrik muss 'Erlebnisse' der Autoren enthalten, und auch Goethes Liebeslyrik verwendet ganz zwangsläufig 'kulturell kodierte Rollen'" [Medieval love lyric must also reflect author 'experiences,' just as Goethe's love lyric necessarily employs 'culturally codified roles'].<sup>17</sup>

Kl. 20 "Es seusst dort her von orient" includes only indirect biographical references. In the poem Oswald demonstrates his familiarity with sea voyages and nautical terms. The first fifteen verses describe the qualities of the morning wind *levante*, and criticism has focused extensively on Oswald's accurate description of the qualities of this wind.<sup>18</sup> Both the historical record and literary evidence demonstrate that Oswald was an experienced traveler and knew the nautical

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<sup>16</sup> The personal pronoun 'I' is with 11,117 instances the most frequent word in Oswald's songs. Cf. *Verskonkordanz zu den Liedern Oswalds von Wolkenstein* (Hss. A und B), ed. George Fenwick Jones, Hans-Dieter Mück and Ulrich Müller, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 40 and 41 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1973); numerous studies address the problem of biography and literary stylization in Oswald's oeuvre, cf. Volker Mertens, "'Biographisierung' in der spätmittelalterlichen Lyrik. Dante – Hadlaub – Oswald von Wolkenstein," *Kultureller Austausch und Literaturgeschichte im Mittelalter*, ed. Ingrid Kasten, Wenner Paravicini and René Pénennec. Beihefte der Francia, 43 (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1998), 331–44; Mertens deduces that Oswald's biographical songs were not so much intended for performance – the reception beyond the two main manuscripts authorized by himself is small – but rather dramatized for the intended *memoria* of him as individual; Cf. also Max Siller, "Oswald von Wolkenstein. Versuch einer psychohistorischen Rekonstruktion," *Mediaevistik* 19 (2006): 125–71, for an attempt to reconstruct Oswald's character and personality based on the influences of his early years. See also Ulrich Müller, "'L'Auteur est mort, vive l'auteur': Love in Poetry and Fiction," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 181–88.

<sup>17</sup> Ulrich Müller, "Minnesang – eine mittelalterliche Form der Erlebnislyrik. Essai zur Interpretation mittelalterlicher Liebeslyrik," *Literarisches Leben. Rollenentwürfe in der Literatur des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters: Festschrift für Volker Mertens*, ed. Matthias Meyer and Hans-Jochen Schiewer (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), 597–617; here 617.

<sup>18</sup> Oswald's technical knowledge in regard to sea voyages has been the focus of the analysis of Kl. 20, such as Werner Marold, *Kommentar zu den Liedern Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, ed. Alan Robertshaw. Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft. Germanistische Reihe, 52 (Innsbruck: Germanistisches Institut, 1995), 63–67.

terminology necessary to maneuver a ship, as he also demonstrates in Kl. 17 “Var, heng und lass.” Here a lady provides her lover, who is leaving for the Holy Land, with instructions for how to maneuver the ship in order to reach the orient [“weg gen oriente,” v. 55].<sup>19</sup> The descriptions of the eight winds follow the sequence of the compass rose and are sprinkled with Italian nautical terms.<sup>20</sup> On a metaphorical level Kl. 17 alludes to how to reach masculine sexual fulfillment, with the lady figured as the Holy Land, rendered through the use of deliberately ambiguous nautical terminology infused with sexual metaphors.<sup>21</sup> In Kl. 20 the blowing *levante* wakes the woman in the morning, and what follows is the lovemaking between the two parties.

Oswald acquired nautical expertise on various voyages at sea. He enjoyed playing with specialized terminology and foreign languages in his songs. His representation of far-away places<sup>22</sup> and cross-cultural encounters<sup>23</sup> reveals an interest in the foreign; and this interest often appears when his songs connect the foreign other to the sexual self, as in Kl. 17 “Var, heng und lass” and Kl. 20 “Es seusst dort her von orient.”

### 3. Gender Roles or Who Is Saying What to Whom?

In Kl. 20 Oswald describes in detail the eastern “levanter” blowing from the orient and thus demonstrates his nautical knowledge. As in Kl. 17 the wind has an erotic

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<sup>19</sup> Note also the parallels of the first verse *Ain tunckle farb von occident* in Kl. 33 with *Es seusst dort her von orient* in Kl. 20 opposing occident and waking at night with orient and waking in the morning.

<sup>20</sup> Marold, 35–40; cf. also Classen for Italian influences in Oswald, Albrecht Classen, *Zur Rezeption norditalienischer Kultur des Trecento im Werk Oswalds von Wolkenstein (1376/77–1445)*. Göppinger Arbeiten zu Germanistik, 571 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1987).

<sup>21</sup> Ships, rough sea, and arriving at the port are in themselves well-known sexual metaphors in the Middle Age; cf. Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität*, 114 and 118; Stefanie Stockhorst, “Offene Obszönität. Bedeutungsangebote der Geschlechtsdarstellungen profaner Tragezeichen im kulturellen Kontext, Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik 59 (2004): 215–34; here 220. The conversation actually takes place while the lovers are having sex (“Si fiengen sich mit luste / se hauff mit ermlin vol, / ir ains das ander kusste, / das geviel in baiden wol,” Kl. 17, 13–16), cf. also Kossack and Stockhorst, “Sexuelles,” 15.

<sup>22</sup> In Kl. 44 “Durch Barbarei, Arabia” Oswald reiterates the far away places his travels took him (vv. 1–17). The singer juxtaposes the wide and exotic world of his travels with the bleak everyday life in his home in the woods of the Tyrolean mountain; in Kl. 18 “Es fügt sich” he looks back on his life and describes in detail his adventures in foreign lands.

<sup>23</sup> The various episodes in Kl. 18 “Es fügt sich” demonstrate Oswald’s interest in and acceptance of foreign customs; he readily accepts that the Queen of Aragon ties a ring into his beard with the instruction never to remove it again. She also pierces his earlobes with a needle and attaches two rings to them, and he wears those for a long time, even though his delegation ridicules him (Kl. 18, III).

connotation for it signifies the imminent separation of the lovers after a night spent together. This particular dawn song has three strophes, with thirty verses divided into two parts of fifteen verses each; the first fourteen have identical rhyme, and the last verse of the first group rhymes with the last verse of the second. A *repeticio* with seven verses consisting of a quartet and tercet (abab ccd) concludes each strophe. The unconventional accumulation of rhymes and their overall virtuoso-like quality underscores Oswald's mastery of the form. According to the manuscripts the musical rendition requires that in performance two voices divide and sing the three parts as a duet, but simultaneously rather than consecutively. The voices thus do not engage with but rather next to each other (polyphony).<sup>24</sup> A brief summary of the song will help with the following analysis while also elucidating the relationship between form and content.

The wind blowing from the orient wakes the young lady ("ain freulin zart," v. 16), and she expresses her dismay with the watchman for not warning the lovers of the approaching daybreak, for he has jeopardized the unnoticed departure of her lover ("knab," v. 38) and hence her reputation. In the third person singular, the *repeticio*<sup>25</sup> relates how she begins to press her body against his, waking him from sleep with her fondling and nuzzling; his manhood springs to life and he makes love to her ("das er began zu krachen, wachen, sunder swachen, machen lieplich zaff," v. 37). The second strophe begins with the young man startled by fear,<sup>26</sup> and now he speaks. He asks his beloved to explain why her tender love-making started out so fiercely, as if she were looking for revenge for a possible wrong-doing on his part. The young woman responds that her lover's impending departure caused her to lose her composure. She goes on to say that the birds persist in announcing the day, and the watchman has tricked them by not waking them in time. The young man responds that her worries deprive him of all joy, for it is indeed her honor that has often been the cause of his joy. He is aware of the ever-present and unsympathetic courtly spies, and thus wishes he were a nightingale that could fly away so that she, his beautiful lover, would not have to risk her reputation by losing "der eren gral" ("the grail of honor"), since she is not even to blame. However, he hopes that nobody will wish her any evil out of envy. He no longer trusts the watchman, who has neglected his duties. The *repeticio*, again in the third

<sup>24</sup> I am following here Spicker, *Oswald von Wolkenstein*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> The *repeticio* is in this case a refrain that differs in content in each strophe (cf. Kl. 16, 17, 21) in contrast to a *repeticio* or a repeating refrain as in Kl. 60, Kl. 73, Kl. 74, Kl. 75, Kl. 81, Kl. 83, Kl. 87, Kl. 89, Kl. 90. Cf. Joschko, *Oswald von Wolkenstein*, 171.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. again Kl. 33 where the male "I" wakes from his dreams with an erection "mich schreckt ain ratz mit grossem tratz,/ davon ich dick erwachen [my dick is stiff and startles me awake, v. 29f], ratz literally rat, is here a metaphor for penis; cf. Kl. 21, 111 *retzli*, Kl. 75, 39 *retzli*, Kl. 21, 99 *müssli*, Kl. 73, 10 *meussli* with *retzli* and *meussli* as affectionate diminutives for 'little rat' and 'little mouse' referring again to the phallus.



person singular, relates in the last seven verses of the strophe how the young woman reacts: She pushes her pointed tongue into his mouth. Blind love is without reason, so she can cry hot tears while at the same time enjoying their lovemaking.<sup>27</sup> The young woman speaks again at the beginning of the third strophe, bemoaning the imminent separation from her loved one because day has broken. She scolds *Tramontana*, the north wind, for letting in the meddling south and east wind, and daybreak has rejected *Ponent*, the west wind. The young man responds that she should not let her clear eyes to be saddened. Her beautifully shaped sweet mouth (*mündlin*) has so enflamed him with love that no harm can befall him.<sup>28</sup> He calls on Saint Balthasar to protect her honor; then, to confirm beyond any doubt that he did not compromise her honor ("an zweifel gar," v. 99), he calls upon the angels to attest to that fact ("das zeug ich mit der engelschar," v. 100). He then asks her to "unlock" her white arms, since he does not dare stay longer. Her answer is brief as she reminds him to come back, and calls upon Saint Peter to protect him. The third person singular of the *repeticio* concludes:

Die maid liess in mit sinnen  
 rinnen in den grans  
 durch weisse zendlin zinne  
 der minne sant Johans (Kl. 20, 105–08)

[The young maiden gently let him  
 pour into her mouth  
 the Saint John's drink of love  
 through the row of little white teeth].

The song concludes with the comment that two lovemaking embraces occur with quick movements back and forth.

The transitions between the strophes seem mismatched. At the end of the first strophe the young man awakes and makes love to the young woman ("das er

27

Das zünglein gan si im spitzen,  
 smitzen in den mund;  
 plind lieb, die hat nicht witzten:  
 hitzen trähers kund  
 si aus den ogling giessen,  
 niessen än verdriessen, sliessen schon verwunt (Kl. 20, 31–37)

[With her pointed tongue she pricked him in the mouth. Blind love is unreasonable: She could shed hot tears from her eyes, and enjoy without getting tired of it embracing in love, wounded as she was].

28

mich hat dein mündlin wolgevar  
 erzunt mit rechter liebe gar,  
 das mir kain not nicht schaden tar (Kl. 20, 91–93)

[Your beautifully shaped mouth has enflamed me in true love so that no harm can befall me].

began zu krachen, / wachen, sunder swachen/ machen lieplich zaff," vv. 35–37), whereas at the beginning of the second strophe all of a sudden her tender love-making ("zärtlich vmbefan") frightens him, for he mistakes her love-making as a possible act of revenge ("grimmer rache"). There are also inconsistencies between the second and third strophe. The young man expresses his fear of being discovered by the courtly spies; the honor of his lover is now in jeopardy, and results in his anger at the watchman. Now we could expect the lovers to part hastily; the woman must be more concerned than he is about being discovered, since it is her honor that is at stake. He also shows compassion at this moment. The genre of the *tagelied* often includes one last embrace between the two lovers, as is the case here; however, Oswald gives the last embrace a new twist. As in the first *repiticio*, it is the woman who takes action by penetrating her lover's mouth with her pointed tongue in v. 69. In the third strophe she repeats the lament that daybreak brings her lover's departure, and that she has to let go of their embrace ("des muss ich ellends magatein / auss lieben slossen strecken," v. 15).

As in the beginning of the second strophe, the man responds to her action, but this time instead of being startled he is elated. Her beautiful mouth causes him to burn with love, and he feels invincible. At this point her honor is no longer his concern. What causes this change in attitude which frees the young man from any sense of responsibility for her honor? Why is the young woman now the one responsible for any consequences?<sup>29</sup>

What may initially appear to be an expression of newly discovered female assertiveness, with the woman taking an active role in or even controlling sex, could also be read as an attempt to diminish male responsibility for the possible consequences of exposure. For we must not forget that the woman's voice is mediated through the voice of a male author. Even though it is the young man who actively makes love to the young woman at the end of the first strophe, it is the young woman who is blamed for her loss of composure. His reaction suggests that female initiation of sex is not to be expected, unless her lover failed to perform during the night, which he did not. At the end of the same strophe the young woman again irrefutably initiates action: she yearns for her lover and takes control with her tongue and mouth; he consequently burns with love for her, which causes him to forget about any sadness, but also affirms that he cannot be held responsible when the loss of her honor is at stake. In short, if she is sexually

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<sup>29</sup> From the beginning it is the loss of her honor that is at stake by his detection. Already in the first strophe the young woman tells the wind that she would regret it forever if his unseen departure were to fail, since this would expose their relationship and mark the loss of her honor. In the second strophe it is she who would lose the "grail of her honor," and it is clear that the woman bears the consequences for the night spent with her lover.

aggressive, she must bear the consequences. The *repeticio* of the third strophe helps to explain the situation further.

The *repeticio* of each of the three strophes, all in the third person singular, compresses what happens between the two lovers: The young woman fondles the young man, who wakes up aroused and makes love to her. The young woman penetrates the young man's mouth with her tongue. She lets him gently pour the Saint John's drink of love into her mouth (*grans*) through the row of her little white teeth. But who is pouring exactly what into whose mouth here?

Werner Marold reads this passage, as Schatz before him, as a double entendre, and speculates that the Saint John's drink of love could have been a farewell drink of wine, with a singer probably hinting at the double entendre during the performance.<sup>30</sup> The *Johannesminne*, or Love of Saint John, refers to the Last Supper (John 13: 23) with John leaning toward Christ as an expression of his love, as found in artistic representations in medieval art. This expression of love has been interpreted as the ultimate idealization of medieval friendship.<sup>31</sup> The Apostle John is also often represented with a cup, and a toast to Saint John was indeed a popular custom, initially to commemorate Saint John, later to offer farewell before a journey or imminent death, or to drink to good health in general. Jacob Grimm notes how references to John the Apostle blend with those to John the Baptist; as a result the *Johannesminne* celebrates the summer solstice with the Saint John's festival and its large Saint John's bonfires.<sup>32</sup> This blending of the old pagan custom to drink to friendship (*Minne trinken*)<sup>33</sup> with the Christian tradition, turned the *Johannesminne* even in medieval monasteries "into an extravagant banquet, certainly related to the exuberant folk festivities taking place on his birthday, 24 June."<sup>34</sup>

Oswald was probably familiar with the *Johannesminne* as a custom, as well as a symbol for ultimate friendship. Hence the double entendre stems from *der mine sant Johans*, the Saint John's drink of love, which either refers to wine or to semen.

<sup>30</sup> Marold, *Kommentar*, 66. Wernfried Hofmeister, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: Sämtliche Lieder und Gedichte*, transl. Wernfried Hofmeister, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 512 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989), here 74, follows Marold when he refers to "der mine sant Johans" as a drink to remember Saint John ("Erinnerungstrunk," in his modern German translation of verse 8 "zur Erinnerung an Sankt Johann."

<sup>31</sup> Hans Karlinger, *Die Kunst der Gotik* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1927), 85, qualifies the "Johannesminne" or 'Love of Saint John' as "mittelalterliche [ ] Freundschaft höchste[r] Verklärung" [the ultimate idealization of medieval friendship].

<sup>32</sup> Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, vol. 2 (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung, 1844), 595.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Minne trinken* as a custom originally in the honor to the gods and as a sign of friendship in the *Nibelungenlied*, where Hagen misappropriates the custom by drinking first to friendship before he kills Ortlieb, the son of Kriemhild and Etzel, with his sword.

<sup>34</sup> Herman Plej, *Dreaming of Cockaigne: Medieval Fantasies of the Perfect Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 132.

The latter appears more likely for two reasons. First, the little white teeth, here "weisse zendlin zinne" [literally "summits of little white teeth"], are part of the inventory of the *descriptio corporis* of the lady in the tradition of *Minnesang*.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, the echoes between the second and third *repeticio* support such a reading. First her pointed tongue penetrates his mouth while tears run down her face; in a reversal she then lets him pour his semen into her mouth with his semen mirroring her tears.<sup>36</sup> The choice of *grans* instead of *mündlin* rhymes with *Johans*, but also refers to the mouth as a beak and relates back to the pointed tongue in the second *repeticio*.<sup>37</sup> A plethora of bird-related metaphors have sexual connotations, from the pecking bird as a phallic animal to catching birds and birding as metaphors for performing sex.<sup>38</sup>

Oswald's song "Der mai mit lieber zal" (Kl. 50), which is about birds in springtime, may thus be read as one whole metaphor for sex. As Herchert has pointed out, a magpie may stand for a woman since this bird embodies the most negative of attributes.<sup>39</sup> The association of the young woman with a bird is thus not unusual, but rather stresses her sexual energy and implicitly criticizes it.<sup>40</sup>

At the end of Kl. 20 in the last *repeticio*, the young woman lets the young man fill her mouth with his semen.<sup>41</sup> When the young man states earlier that her beautiful mouth causes him to burn with love for her, Oswald may hint at more than just

<sup>35</sup> Teeth are also a part of the *descriptio corporis* in Kl. 61, 12: "Nas, zendlin, kin, kel, der hals zu tal" [nose, little teeth, chin, throat and neck] and Kl. 87, 6-7: "Darinn ain mündlin rosen var, / smielisch mit zendlin weiss besteckt" [with a rose colored little mouth, smiling and with white little teeth].

<sup>36</sup> In Luke 7: 36-39 a female sinner, likely a prostitute, wets Jesus feet with her tears and dries them off with her long hair before anointing him. According to Galen, women like man need to seminate, and they do by menstruating. In this tradition tears may be read as a sign of excessive sexuality.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Kl. 27, 1: "Ich hab gehört durch mangel granns" [I heard how from many a beak/ mouth]. Ms. A has the spelling 'grans.'

<sup>38</sup> Herchert, 'Acker', 223-24.

<sup>39</sup> Herchert, 'Acker', 223. The magpie talks too much, engages constantly in arguments, and steals because of its vanity. In Kl. 50 the raven and close relative of the magpie insists on being also a good singer, but in order to do sing, he cannot be hungry but must be satisfied, and so her song goes, 'Push it in! Inside with it! Fill me up!' with the sexual undertones well understood in the late Middle Ages. The literal English translation of the German verb "vögeln" (transitive and intransitive) for sexual intercourse is "to bird."

<sup>40</sup> A garden full of birds is an especially popular metaphor with the garden representing the vulva, cf. Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität*, 118, who explains further that any moveable object in such an enclosure may then represent sexual intercourse. Lexer's Middle High German dictionary actually refers to the above text passage from Oswald as an instance of *grans* for vulva.

<sup>41</sup> So already hinted at by Marold and expressed explicitly by Kossack and Stockhorst, "Sexuelles," who state: "Die gänzlich unverholene Darstellung sexueller Intimität findet schließlich ihren Höhepunkt in der von jeder moralischen Verurteilung freien Beschreibung eines *coitus per os*" (25; The completely unashamed representation of sexual intimacy finds its climax at last in the description of a *coitus per os* without any moral condemnation.)

the beautiful features of the young woman's mouth. To recapitulate the three *repeticio*: The young woman fondles the young man who wakes up aroused and makes love to her. The young woman pushes her pointed tongue into the young man's mouth while shedding tears. The young woman performs fellatio.<sup>42</sup> The choice of wording in the final *repeticio* stresses her active involvement—she lets him pour (liess in mit sinnen rinnen)—even though the young man performs the *rinnen* ('pouring' of the semen) and thus the action. This difference is slight but important because Oswald chooses to represent the young woman in all three instances as having an active role in sex. First she fondles the sleeping young man so that he wakes up and makes love to her. In the second *repeticio* Oswald stresses her active role even further since she penetrates his mouth, thus taking on the role of the aggressor, while the man finds himself in a receptive and passive role usually reserved for the woman.<sup>43</sup> Such an implied role reversal is not necessarily an indication of actual female power, since the man's voice repeatedly stresses the significance of womanly honor and finally invokes *Sant Balthasar* to protect the young woman's honor while he assures himself that he has not compromised her honor. This claim would imply that if they did not engage in sexual intercourse and she still is a virgin, his statement is not incorrect but in fact true because her hymen is still intact. The hymen thus functions as bodily evidence of a woman's honor to be tested during the wedding night. In Kl. 92 a male shepherd attempts to seduce a shepherdess to join him on his meadow. He promises her to show restraint when she is reluctant and reminds him of his former broken promises. He then states that she suffered only insignificant bodily harm ("Der schad, der schad was klaine, der deinem leib allda beschach," v. 31), to which she responds that proof of his words will come only once she is a bride and the wedding night would reveal that her hymen is still intact ("Das wirt, das wirt sich sagen erst, so ich werden sol ein braut, / ob sich verraucket hat mein haut," vv. 35–36).

If Kl. 33 "Ain tunckle farb von occident" breaks with the conventional inventory of the traditional dawn song and represens an anti-type, Kl. 20 "Es seusst dort her

<sup>42</sup> Moreover if *grens* refers also to the vulva, oral sex and sexual intercourse merge on a metaphorical level, however such an association appears less likely in connotation with the little white teeth referring to the young woman. For other examples in medieval documents that could be read as reflections of oral sex, see Peter Dinzelbacher, "Mittelalterliche Sexualität – die Quellen," *Privatisierung der Triebe? Sexualität in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Daniela Erlach, Markus Reisenleitner, and Karl Vocelka. Frühneuzeit-Studien, 1 (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 47–110; here 57–58.

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Mazzo Karras, *Sexuality in the Medieval World. Doing unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), here 140, points out that "the dichotomy between active and passive is complicated in the case of oral sex. In anal, interfemoral, or for that matter vaginal sex, the active partner was considered the penetrator." According to Roman interpretation, "the penetrator in oral sex was also the active partner, while the fellator was the passive partner, the conceptual distinction was based on penetration."

von orient" keeps to the traditional register when it comes to time, place, and people; however, love aims for the fulfillment of sexual desire.<sup>44</sup> It is all but surprising after two hundred years to encounter variations in a genre, in form, as well as in content. Oswald demonstrates with Kl. 20 that he is well aware of the genre's tradition, and since he employs the traditional inventory, the change in content is all the more striking.

The gender roles are not altogether abandoned, but newly negotiated, and reveal traces of an underlying male uneasiness or insecurity. In the end the ultimate power rests with the young man. If he lets himself be discovered, the young woman's honor is lost forever. And it is the woman who is locked in the arms of the young man's embrace, when the storm first wakes her up:

Den sturm erhort ain freulin zart,  
do es mit armen banden hart  
mit liebem lust verslossen ward. (Kl. 20, 16–18)

[A storm awoke a young maiden  
lying in bed and strongly held  
in arms locked in love].

In the third strophe she laments that she has to free herself from love's embrace: "des müß ich ellends magatein / auss lieben slossen strecken" (Kl. 20, 88–89; Therefore I, what miserable young woman, / stretch myself free from the lock of love].

The woman may play an active part, but she is the one locked in his embrace, which reveals the man's actual control. When the young man tells her at the end of the third strophe to unlock her arms since he does not dare to stay longer ("sleuss auff dein weisse ermlin mar" [Kl. 20, 101; unlock your tender white arms]), he employs a strategy that assigns her the responsibility for his timely departure in order to insure her honor, as he already did previously. Even then he remains in power by telling her what to do.

Sexual pleasure is reserved for the young man alone. He burns in love, and finds himself in such a height of ecstasy that he feels invincible, whereas she laments their separation and thus reveals her fear of detection and loss of honor. Female sexual pleasure is not even hinted at and, if it exists at all, is restricted to her deriving pleasure from pleasing the male partner and longing for his return.

In their exchanges, the lovers do not actually talk with, but rather to each other, signaling simultaneity over linear succession, as does the similar content of strophe and *repeticio*. As in the musical rendition, the voices do not engage with one another. Oswald does not establish new gender roles, but assigns the woman

<sup>44</sup> Kl. 101 shows exactly the same situation, with daybreak from orient, singing birds, and painful departure, but here the similarities stop. As new and daring Kl. 20 is, as traditional is Kl. 101.

a more active part when it comes to sex. Most surprising, though, is the very representation of sex for the sake of pleasure in the context of a traditional genre, even if restricted solely to the man. Daring in his choice, the highly artful rendition exhibits Oswald's love for playing with language. Both lovers in Kl. 20, the young woman and the young man, have committed a sin by engaging in oral sex, but the song seems to express indifference on this transgression, so long as the outer appearance of probity is preserved.

#### 4. Late Medieval Society's Views of Oral Sex

In Kl. 20, the young man's insistence on not having compromised the young woman's honor reveals an understanding of honor that is embodied in the female hymen. Does this understanding indicate that non-reproductive sex was more common or at least more openly discussed in the late medieval period than previously thought? Church authorities regarded sodomy as a "sin against nature," and they defined sodomy as any form of non-procreative intercourse, including oral sex.<sup>45</sup> Oswald himself confesses in Kl. 39, in the tradition of a *Beichtlied* (confessional), to having committed sodomy ("ich kenn die sünd von sodoman," Kl. 39, 35). Here again, we have to ask ourselves how much is biographical and how much is genre specific since the song is highly stylized.<sup>46</sup> But even if the biographical Oswald confesses to having committed sodomy, we do not know what kind of sexual act he refers to since all sexual behavior that did not lead to conception was considered sodomy.<sup>47</sup> Committing sodomy was therefore nothing out of the ordinary, but rather common since it also included masturbation and non-standard sexual positions, in short all sexual practices for

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<sup>45</sup> Karras, *Sexuality*, 134. According to a widely cited treatise by William Peraldus, the "sin against nature" was classified "into two types, heterosexual vaginal intercourse in an unusual position or the ejaculation of semen other than in the vagina." Karras explains further that even if the first type is disregarded, "it is still clear that anal intercourse (or indeed oral, although that seems to have been less common or at least less discussed) would be included regardless of the sex of the participants." Cf. also the essay on "The Prosecution of Sex in Late Medieval Troyes" by Sara McDougall in this volume.

<sup>46</sup> For an analysis of Kl. 39 in the tradition of the *Beichtlied*, cf. George Fenwick Jones, "Oswald von Wolkenstein's 'Mein Sünd und Schuld' and the 'Beichtlied' Tradition," *Modern Language Notes* 85 (1970): 635–51.

<sup>47</sup> For the problematic understanding of the word "sodomy" in older texts see Helmut Puff's discussion on the term in the introduction to his study *Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600* (The University of Chicago Press, 2003). Cf. also Brigitte Spreitzer, *Die stumme Sünde. Homosexualität im Mittelalter: Mit einem Textanhang*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 498 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1988). In general sodomy referred to all sexual acts that avoided conception, but in certain contexts sodomy meant certain acts.

the sake of sexual pleasure.<sup>48</sup> And it is mostly for the sake of sexual pleasure that Oswald's lovers meet, whether in the woods, on the meadow, in the barn, in the bathtub, or in the secrecy of the night behind closed doors. Sexual pleasure was chastised by the church, but that Oswald composed a number of songs that were also performed in public, indicates that sexual pleasure was less of a taboo in Oswald's time, or at least within in his own world.<sup>49</sup> Procreation was not the main reason to engage in sex, even if church doctrine required it to be. If a woman wished to experience sexual pleasure while avoiding the loss of virginity, non-vaginal sex was the safest choice. Even if such sexual transgression was sinful, it must have been not uncommon, probably just as today.

Karras notes that there exist "remarkably few references ... to oral, anal, or manual sex between women and men."<sup>50</sup> It is thus all the more interesting when Oswald chooses to write about oral sex.

From Oswald's biography, we can speculate that he was familiar with many foreign customs, probably including more permissive views on sexuality. The corbels at the church of San Pedro de Cervatos in Northern Spain illustrate a variety of sexual practices, cunnilingus among them. A corbel at the church of the Colegiata de Santillana in the same region shows a couple performing mutual oral sex. Openly displayed sexual practices like cunnilingus and fellatio on the capitals and corbels of a Christian church may be surprising, unless we recognize their function as examples of sinful behavior often in combination with anti-Islamic propaganda.<sup>51</sup> The Christian church associated heathens with a less refined way of living, and unbridled, uninhibited sex including 'wild' and 'animalistic' sexual practices outlawed by the Christian church were part of that conception. The

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<sup>48</sup> For the discussion of permitted sexual positions according to church doctrine, cf. James A. Brundage, "Let Me Count the Ways: Canonists and Theologians Contemplate Coital Positions," *Journal of Medieval History* 10 (1984): 81–93.

<sup>49</sup> The gradual change in attitude leads to rather explicit representation of sexuality, but mostly accompanied by humorous undertones or the grotesque. See also the essay by Albrecht Classen on "Sexual Desire and Pornography: Literary Imagination in a Satirical Context. Gender Conflict, Sexual Identity, and Misogyny in the 'Nonnenturnier'" in this volume.

<sup>50</sup> Karras, *Sexuality*, 108.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Claudio Lange, *Der nackte Feind: Anti-Islam in der romanischen Kunst* (Berlin: Parthas, 2004); Claudio Lange, "Plastischer Kirchenschmuck und Islam. Zur Deutung des Obszönen," *Liebesfreuden im Mittelalter: Kulturgeschichte der Erotik und Sexualität in Bildern und Dokumenten*, ed. Gabriele Bartz, Alfred Karneine, Claudio Lange (Stuttgart and Zurich: Belser Verlag, 1994), 97–121. Lange shows in his groundbreaking study the possible anti-Islamic program of such sculptures from churches in Southern France and Northern Spain from the eleventh and twelfth century. The enemy is here according to Lange ridiculed in naked and 'perverted' sculptures on church capitals and corbels. See also Christina Weising's study in this volume on corbels, "A Vision of 'Sexuality,' 'Obscenity' or 'Nudity'? Regional Differences in the Images of Corbels." Weising stresses the necessity to study each and every corbel within its context of emergence and contextuality.



corbels and capitals thus represent a visual analogy to the detailed descriptions of 'deviant' sexual behavior in the medieval penitentials.<sup>52</sup> Oswald's travel experience had also led him to Northern Spain, and he may even have seen such statues with his own eyes since they were common at the churches en route to Santiago de Compostela. In any case his travels most likely exposed him to a broader view of sexual practices, and his personal experiences may have added to this more open view of sexuality. Towns and cities also ran brothels, and prostitution by that time had become a common utility.<sup>53</sup> City ordinances addressed 'unnatural' practices, but they mostly targeted homosexuality and masturbation, and the latter was not subject to public prosecution.<sup>54</sup> Most penitentials "treated homosexual offenses more severely than heterosexual ones, prescribing greater severity for anal than for oral sex."<sup>55</sup> To make any statements regarding the pervasiveness of non-vaginal sex in general and oral sex specifically throughout the Middle Ages is nearly impossible.<sup>56</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein's Kl. 20 "Es seusst dor her von orient" is therefore of considerable importance for us today because it offers us a way to catch a glimpse of the significance of non-vaginal sex in the late Middle Ages.<sup>57</sup> Since he felt comfortable enough to refer to oral sex, even if somewhat veiled through poetic language, we may conclude that the practice was recognized as not

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<sup>52</sup> See also Classen's introduction to this volume, 13, 67, and 89.

<sup>53</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Gertrud Blaschitz.

<sup>53</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 535. For further discussion of cases of actual prosecution or lack thereof cf. especially Sara McDougall's "The Prosecution of Sex in Late Medieval Troyes" in this volume. She concludes in the case of the court in Troyes, 708: "Sex in inappropriate positions, prostituted, or non-procreative sex left virtually no traces in officiality records. The prosecution addressed illegal combination of persons rather than manner of sexual activity."

<sup>54</sup> Warren Johansson and William A. Percy, "Homosexuality," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1696 (New York and London: Garland, 1996), 166.

<sup>55</sup> Oral-genital sex is to this day stigmatized in the Western world. *The Kinsey Institute New Report on Sex* from 1991 mentions a study stating that more than ninety percent of married couples under the age of twenty-five had engaged in oral sex, and another study with one hundred heterosexual couples showed similar results; however, a small percentage has "a strong emotional bias against it." June Machover Reinisch, *The Kinsey Institute New Report on Sex* (New York: Martin's Press, 1991), 132–33. Even though oral sex is common, the topic remains taboo.

<sup>56</sup> As Karras says, "there is no medieval Kinsey Report," and she sums up the significance of literary sources for the history of sexuality as follows: "Literary sources may be among the most useful sources for the history of sexuality because (in the absence of private letters) imaginative literature gives us the most vivid examples of actual medieval life – or so it seems. They may be no more accurate representations of how medieval people actually lived than pulp fiction is of the way people live today. Literary representations of human behavior do not reflect lived experience in any simple way – or even, necessarily, in any complex way. In fact, they may have influenced experience – by affecting how people understood and interpreted it – more than they reflect it, and they certainly influence how we reconstruct medieval experience." Karras, *Sexuality*, 10.

uncommon, at least in the case of a young woman who wished to uphold her body's uncompromised integrity in form of the hymen. For oral-genital sex makes conception impossible.<sup>58</sup>

Karras concludes "that medieval people simply did not talk about [non-vaginal sex], or at any rate write about it; it fell into the category of 'the unmentionable sin,' along with homosexual sodomy."<sup>59</sup> While it is likely that Karras, as a historian, is correct in general terms, it has to be conceded that people talked and even wrote about it more than we possibly realize, but we have to read with open eyes and look for the evidence in literary sources. If in Oswald's Kl. 33 the male "I" experiences a restless night missing his beloved and is therefore repeatedly woken by "ain ratz mit großem tratz" (Kl. 33, 30), we must recognize that the rat is a common metaphor for the penis, and that nightly erections are the cause of the disturbed sleep. In Heinrich Wittenwiler's *Ring* from about the same time period we find a scene in which a physician invites a young maiden "to enjoy his root" ("Der wurtzen muost du niessen," v. 2146), and the maiden obliges willingly by "eating the root" ("Da mit ward sei der wurtzen essen," v. 2151).<sup>60</sup> Here the root could easily be misread as simply a root, after all it is a physician that speaks, but within the context of the scene, the sexual connotation is obvious. By employing

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<sup>57</sup> Here the sexual pleasure without compromising the body is most important for the young woman, not avoiding conception alone. Tilmann Walter, *Unkeuschheit und Werk der Liebe: Diskurse über Sexualität am Beginn der Neuzeit in Deutschland* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 259, points out that in literary documents from the early modern period always unmarried couples engage in non-vaginal sex ("Es fällt freilich auf, daß es in den genannten Erzählungen unverheiratete Paare sind, die Techniken des Liebesspiels anwenden, die eine Schwangerschaft unmöglich werden lassen").

<sup>58</sup> Medieval women knew about other methods of contraception, cf. John M. Riddle, "Contraception and Early Abortion in the Middle Ages," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1696 (New York and London: Garland, 1996), 261–77.

<sup>59</sup> Karras, *Sexuality*, 108.

<sup>60</sup> *Heinrich Wittenwilers Ring. Nach der Meininger Handschrift*, ed. Edmund Wiessner (1931; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964). Thanks go to Albrecht Classen for calling this scene to my attention. Walter, *Unkeuschheit*, 259 mentions a later Fastnachtsspiel where a root is intended to help to cure the woman from a toothache. Walter states that in the early modern period authors are less inspired by oral sex than anal intercourse to toy with language. Oral sex is mentioned without further commentary or motivation of the fictional characters. It appears that at least fellatio was at that time nothing out of the ordinary, whereas literary references to cunnilingus are less common. The sexual pleasure of the man is of importance, whereas the woman enjoys pleasing him. In Valentin Schumann's *Nachbüchlein* from 1559 a servant gets a naive farmer's daughter to perform fellatio. He pushes his 'pipe' into her mouth, and she laughingly comments that this is indeed a nice little pipe, and they practiced this quiet a while ("Der knecht wusch ubersie her, stieß ir didelmanns pfeiffen in das maul. Des lachet sie und sprach: 'Ey, das ist ein feine pfeiffen [. . .]. Nun tryben sie das lange zeit." Cited after Walter, 258).

the metaphor of the root with its medical connotation, the double entendre of remedy with phallus is hence more witty.<sup>61</sup>

In order to capture a more complete picture of medieval sexuality, we must not only recognize but also read the metaphors for what they represent. By silencing or obscuring the full meaning of sexual metaphors, we expose our own inhibitions and discomfort, revealing more about ourselves than about the text. More disturbing, we engage in an act of oppression that hinders a fuller understanding of the text (or any medium) itself and in so doing deprive ourselves of the opportunity to gain wider knowledge of medieval sexuality in general. It is thus exciting to read Oswald von Wolkenstein and discover a new kind of artistic representation of sexuality that affords us a better understanding of at least one aspect of medieval society.

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<sup>61</sup> See the contribution to this volume by Albrecht Classen, and also his Introduction.

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Intersecting the Ideal and the Real, Chivalry and Rape,  
Respect and Dishonor:  
The Problematics of Sexual Relationships  
in *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Athelston*, and *Sir Tristrem*

For a faithful lover ought to prefer love's greatest pains to making demands which deprive his beloved of her modesty or taking pleasure in making fun of her blushes; he is not called a lover, but a betrayer, who would consider only his own passions and who would be unmindful of the good of his beloved.  
(Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*)

The history of sexual and gendered oppression of women cannot be denied, for women's bodies have traditionally been the site of male rivalry, the terrain on which it is fought, as well as the grounds of male inspiration. They have even been the trophy, paraded for other eyes, the objects of penetrating gaze on which the possessor can gloat. On the other hand, respectful chivalric treatment of women is also a reality—in literature and probably medieval life. Perhaps many courtly romances may be thought purposely to educate the male audience to treat women respectfully. No doubt, our modern understanding of past sexual behavior is informed by current expectations, desires and fears; nevertheless, prevailing gendered readings reveal multiple and ambiguous ways in which medieval sexual relationships enhance or diminish their partners.

Is ambiguity and idealization of romance and chivalry a means to normalize less-than-ideal sexual unions? In other words, do authors idealize relationships to

offset or balance the often less-than-desirable reality?<sup>1</sup> Are respect and adoration merely dishonest ruses promulgated against women, or men, to seduce or snare them within medieval literature? Does heterosexual love inspire chivalry or hinder its success as a dangerous force threatening homosocial bonds? Are rape scenes a means of titillation, generating more of the same in life or literature, or the discursive space upon which to examine social, legal, and moral ramifications of such anti-normative violence? These are difficult questions, since they depend on varied audiences in multiple historic contexts responding in disparate fashions. Albrecht Classen offers the reasonable proposition that “most literary texts in which male and female characters interact with each other reflect a continuous negotiation process which has required constant adjustments and corrections in the audience’s and the protagonists’ perceptions, attitudes, and approaches ever since poets have addressed issues pertaining to love, marriage, and conflicts between the genders.”<sup>2</sup> Courtly literature and romance stand out as primary examples of amatory tales, but despite the negotiation, sometimes the most powerful held sway over the relationship, and even over the beloved. Classen concludes that “[V]iolence between husband and wife was, alas, a rather common phenomenon in the Middle Ages, at least as reflected in the literary testimony . . . . Moreover, the laws of the Church and secular laws commonly supported men’s privilege to punish their wives if they transgressed specific rules set up by their husbands., However, as all our literary examples demonstrate, violent behavior against the marriage partner, specifically unjustified brutal and mean treatment, was clearly characterized as domestic violence and was regarded as highly condemnable.”<sup>3</sup>

Given Church influences, sexuality itself may be treated with ambivalence in the Middle Ages, and sometimes the masculine treatment or assessment of the feminine is ambivalent, or even downright negative. One reason for this attitude derived from the Church Fathers’ beliefs about women in general and sexuality

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<sup>1</sup> J. Stephen Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness: Civilizing Trends and the Formation of Courtly Ideals: 930–1210*. The Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, paperback 1989), 158, provides an historical example of “less-than-desirable reality”: “To speak in a courtly way is appropriate to lovemaking. There is a very distasteful story told of the clerk Gervase of Tilbury that connects the two. Riding through the countryside with the archbishop of Rheims one day, he spied a beautiful woman working in a vineyard. He rides up and after a closer look is smitten with desire. He begins to ‘speak to her in the courtly way of wanton love’ (‘de amore lascivo curialiter affatur’). Her stubborn defense of her chastity reveals her as a Cathar. Gervase reports the incident to the archbishop, and some days later she is burned at the stake.”

<sup>2</sup> Albrecht Classen, *The Power of a Woman’s Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures: New Approaches to German and European Women Writers and to Violence Against Women in Premodern Times*. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 1 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Classen, *The Power of a Woman’s Voice*, 228.

in particular. The context of life, religious and social, throughout the Middle Ages is the religious disapprobation of sexuality, and by extension, of the feminine. The following quotation from the *Malleus Maleficarium* written between 1495 and 1505 suggests some of the rancor felt by the religious males of the time:

... three general vices appear to have special dominion over wicked women, namely infidelity, ambition, and lust. Therefore they are more than others inclined towards witchcraft, who more than others are given to these vices. Again, since of these three vices the last chiefly predominates, women being insatiable, etc., it follows that those among ambitious women are more deeply infected who are more hot to satisfy their filthy lusts; and such are adulteresses, fornicatresses, and the concubines of the great.<sup>4</sup>

With this institutional view of women infecting the minds of the populace, no wonder the literature of the times reflected misogynist attitudes. This medieval misogyny has ancient origins, as Alcuin Blamires points out,

By one route it leads back into ancient Judaic law: by another route it leads back to the dawn of Greek culture, where notions were already current in Hesiod's poetry (ca. 750 BC) of woman as the deceitful plague of man, responsible for bringing evil into the world . . . [Richard du Bury writes] women are of an animal, material, household, pragmatic realm while men (intelligent men, anyway) are of a realm of higher deliberation which shuns the "animal." . . . [T]he Fathers of the Church followed suit [fearing "the distraction represented by the ties of marriage and family" (3)] in that they used this argument in discouraging female virgins from marrying, or widows from remarrying, as much as they used to champion male celibacy . . . the male would only reach the summit of spiritual and mental development by abjuring this distraction of family and woman.<sup>5</sup>

Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine concur, the first of these claiming of women: "You are the gateway of the devil; you are the one who unseals the curse of that tree, and you are the first one to turn your back on the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the devil was not capable of corrupting; you easily destroyed the image of God, Adam. Because of what you deserve, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die."<sup>6</sup> John of Chrysostom concludes "the woman taught the man once and made him guilty of disobedience, and ruined everything. Therefore, because she made bad use of

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<sup>4</sup> *The Malleus Maleficarum* of Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, trans. Reverend Montague Summers. Republication of the work by John Rodker (1928; New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1971), 47.

<sup>5</sup> Alcuin Blamires, ed. *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 2–3.

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, Quintus Septimius Florens (ca. 160–ca. 225), From *The Appearance of Women* quoted in Alcuin Blamires, ed. *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 51.

her power over the man, or rather her equality with him, God made her subject to her husband."<sup>7</sup> Misogyny abounds in the writings of these Church Fathers.

Sexual or non-sexual violence is also based on half of the dichotomous medieval Eve-Mary paradigm, the immanent seductress and the removed virgin, in which the former warrants ill-treatment or rejection. Neither encourage intimacy. As the role of these two icons is placed upon women, sexual ramifications emerge. Guinevere, for example, may be both, depending on who in the court is perceiving her. Lady Bercilac in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has been forced to play "the Eve role" to please her husband, but Morgan le Fay, operating from the background, seems to enjoy the role of dominatrix.<sup>8</sup> Sexual violence may even be masked as seduction, albeit unwanted, or subtle coercion. Chaucer's Criseyde responds to the sexual coercion around her by succumbing to male pressure. Other Chaucerian women are likewise sexual prey for seemingly adoring but actually unchivalric males, although the feminine response to sexual use and abuse may be grudging acceptance of their husbands or male authority figures: women such as Symkin's wife and daughter Malyn in *The Reeve's Tale* and Emily in *The Knight's Tale* may be beguiled or passively reconciled. On the other hand, certain strong women such as the crafty Wife of Bath may do the beguiling. As Classen notes in his *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs*, Chaucer made a most remarkable contribution to the discourse of love, marriage, sovereignty, authority, and gender roles with his portrayal of this Wife of Bath. The present discussion will exemplify the ambiguity of sexual attitudes by considering one major instance of ignoble coercion in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and another of idealized, ennobling sexuality in *Tristan and Isolt*, with brief reinforcement from other tales which deprecate or idealize love.

The clerical view of woman as either Mary or Eve, emotionally removed or devilishly tempting or dangerous, influenced literature and perhaps life for many centuries since at least late antiquity,<sup>9</sup> and perhaps even today in many parts of the world, including the USA. No wonder then, that sexual violence perpetrated against women is shockingly—or rather not shockingly at all—common in medieval literature, even in romance. Brutality functions in several capacities: it places women in the vulnerable position of needing, and perhaps earning, the right to yet another male as protection from this violence; it requires her to be dependent, grateful, and indebted for this protection; it teaches her the inevitability of abuse; it offers men opportunity to display might and force in

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<sup>7</sup> St. John Chrysostom, from *Woman Not to Teach*, quoted in Alcuin Blamires, ed. *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 59.

<sup>8</sup> See now Carolyn Larrington, *King Arthur's Enchantresses: Morgan and Her Sisters in Arthurian Tradition* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 29–50.

<sup>9</sup> Consider the Golden Age of Greek drama, for example, whose startlingly powerful women such as Clytemnestra and Medea were physically dangerous to the males surrounding them.

either their own violations, or preventing violence of others; it allows men to use rape, wittingly or not, as a means to convert violence into chivalry; it inures both genders and the audience to sexual turmoil, making it palatable; all are enjoined to remain silent about the rape, since the wife's stigma for being violated was as severe as the male's punishment for his violation. Rape may encourage violence as a sexually titillating factor for either or both participants; it may establish conditions for masochistic acceptance, or sadistic hostility against the offending gender, and it may further generate bias and misogyny in characters and audience.

One wonders how much the incessant tournaments and battles were sexually motivated, how much sex and violence are entwined, an issue relevant even today. As James A. Schultz points out, "The things that impinge on the courtly lover from outside and cause him or her to fall in love are all attributes of nobility and courtliness; the body that is beautiful and radiant because it is noble; courtly qualities like loyalty and renown; clothing that confirms and projects the courtliness and nobility of the wearer; and a variety of courtly behavior in courtly settings. Courtly lovers are aristophiliacs: they fall in love with nobility and courtliness."<sup>10</sup> Courtly accoutrements include tournaments, ritualized battles sanitized and socially regulated to restrict danger of physical violence. One category of knights and ladies, in Schultz's words, "never manage to articulate their love in words. Instead their love takes the form of knightly and courtly ritual: tournaments, battles, ceremonies of greetings and eating, festivals, and ultimately, marriage."<sup>11</sup> Despite the ritualized nature of this violence, aggression is thus seen as widespread, persisting even in this seemingly safe harbor.

Although the protracted preface to *Troilus and Criseyde's* love-making, deeply emotional and psychological, is extensive and significant to subsequent events (albeit not yet coercive), critics have failed to consider its depth and meaning.<sup>12</sup> Rather, most have moved on to the encounter, and the separation, with nary a look back.<sup>13</sup> Chauncey Wood is one exception, for in discussing *Troilus's* falling in love,

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<sup>10</sup> James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 2006), xx.

<sup>11</sup> Schultz, *Courtly Love*, xx.

<sup>12</sup> Chauncey Wood, *The Elements of Chaucer's Troilus* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), 38, however notes "One of the most significant changes that Chaucer makes from the *Filostrato* is to introduce, in Book I, nine stanzas on the process of *Troilus's* falling in love." Wood discusses *Troilus's* psychological state of infatuation, his free will, and the power of love, but not his seduction or behavior toward *Criseyde*. More interestingly, Wood remarks: "The idea that the hero of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is ennobled by his love for *Criseyde* is so commonly encountered in modern critical estimates of the poem that one tends to forget its relative novelty" (63). See Wood, 73–76, for a critical survey detailing love's ennobling power. This investigation challenges that widespread assumption of *Troilus's* nobility.

<sup>13</sup> Barry Windeatt's statement "*Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde* is by far his most ambitious poem" ("*The Text of the Troilus*," *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Mary Salu Chaucer Studies III [Cambridge, Eng. and Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 1979], 1–22; here 1), accounts for the



he contends "Troilus' capitulation to the God of Love cannot bring about what the poem says it brings about"<sup>14</sup>—namely ennoblement—for

When Troilus is confirmed into the religion of the God of Love, a religion with seduction and idolatry for its means and goal, he promptly loses what self-governance he had had . . . Upon inspection the arguments for Troilus' ennoblement by love based on external evidence—such as the appeal to courtly love—and the arguments for his oral improvement based on internal evidence—such as the appeals to passages proclaiming his banishment of vice—are all unpersuasive.<sup>15</sup>

Wood believes Troilus's vice and failure of nobility is his "capitulation to the God of Love," lack of self-governance, and vulnerability to an illicit passion for Criseyde—"a self-imposed bondage by sin,"<sup>16</sup> whereas my contention is that Troilus's failure of nobility is his reckless and persistent seduction of Criseyde against her will. This study hopes to highlight the prefatory scenes of Troilus's falling in love and calculated manipulation, albeit genuinely passionately motivated, of a vulnerable widow abetted by her own uncle. It will then explore the nature of love in *Sir Tristrem* as a contrast, wherein genuine devotion and affection predominate. What Schultz states of the German *Tristrem* version by Gottfried von Strassburg (*Tristan*), that "Tristan is more elaborately invested in reciprocal love than any other MHG [Middle High German] text"<sup>17</sup> can also be said of the Middle English version. However, a brief nod to the Middle English Metrical Romance *Athelstan* will reveal that outright brutality and crass violence also have their place in this non-courtly sub-genre of romance.

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voluminous criticism devoted to the poem. E. T. Donaldson, [*Speaking of Chaucer, The Ending of the Troilus* (New York: W.w. Norton, 1970), 92, finds the lesson of the poem "that human love, and by a sorry corollary, everything human is unstable and illusory . . . the meaning of the poem is not the moral but a complex qualification of the moral." Elizabeth Salter believes "the unique excellence of *Troilus and Criseyde* is . . . the growth and release of the poet's imagination" ("*Troilus and Criseyde*: A Reconsideration," *Patterns of Love and Courtesy in Memory of C. S. Lewis*, ed. John Lawlor [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966], 86–106; here 88). Alan T. Gaylord's "The Lesson of the *Troilus*: Chastisement and Correction," *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, 23–42; here 25, concludes, "the chastisement of the hero is tragically ineffective. There is no one in the poem to correct him. And his final vision is more like a quick peek in the back of the book than a completed lesson." But for him, Troilus's failure is never finding wisdom: "emotional and intellectual satisfaction" (23), not manipulative abuse of Criseyde. Alfred David, "Chaucerian Comedy and Criseyde," *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, 90–104; here 91, acknowledges that the tragic ending "is, in fact, the only possible ending, foreshadowed from the very first through Chaucer's irony." Although this is true, he never implicates Troilus or Pandarus in the cause of that tragedy.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, *The Elements of Chaucer's Troilus*, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Wood, *The Elements of Chaucer's Troilus*, 97–98.

<sup>16</sup> Wood, *The Elements of Chaucer's Troilus*, 98.

<sup>17</sup> Schultz, *Courtly Love*, 153.

Stephen Barney is right that “[Chaucer’s] arena is the bedroom . . . a world of social comedy and intimate and scrupulous moral probing,”<sup>18</sup> but modern investigation of that probing is decidedly mired in the subjective notion that aggressive seduction is moral and acceptable. Hegemony may be disguised as liberation, for clearly Criseyde possesses little liberty. While the surface semiotics might suggest idealized chivalric banter, the deep structure reveals a determinedly manipulative force, an unchivalric reality. Barney aptly lists “the many forms of loving, noble and divine and fleshly, farcical and elegant and violent, comic and tragic,”<sup>19</sup> but he fails to include coercive and hence unchivalric. As Holly A. Crocker suggests, Troilus “seeks to place himself in a privileged, autonomous position, one from which he may evaluate femininity while remaining independent of its influence. He may judge women, but they have no power over him.”<sup>20</sup> This righteous independence demands emotional wall-building, distance, and lack of chivalry, to say nothing of manipulation and seduction. Let us consider the details of that seduction.

First Pandarus, and then Troilus himself, lure Criseyde into a liaison not of her choosing—more a case of seductive date-rape than violent imposition, but in any case, lacking in courtly nobility.<sup>21</sup> Corrine Saunders points out the literary prevalence of rape, noting

The images of rape and ravishment recur too in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and recall the potential force within chivalric society . . . . The idea of consensual ravishment recurs in Book IV, with Pandarus’s suggestion that Troilus “ravysshe” Criseyde away; indeed, for Pandarus, the setting of Troy makes the act of ravishment entirely appropriate [IV.533–36] . . . . The image of rape also figures earlier in the poem, creating a troubling subtext in the narrative of the love of Troilus and Criseyde. Images of violence and violation function to illuminate Criseyde’s vulnerability, and her imprisonment within the structure of the patriarchal society—not only the decrees of Parliament, but more generally, the social constraint created by her widowhood and her father’s treason, and the force inherent in the combined persuasions of Pandarus and Troilus, which so oddly mix devotion, courtship, manipulation and threat, and to which Criseyde becomes a consenting victim. Pandarus’s visit to Criseyde’s room on

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen A. Barney, ed. *Troilus and Criseyde: Geoffrey Chaucer*, Introduction (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Barney, *Troilus and Criseyde*, xviii–xix.

<sup>20</sup> Holly A. Crocker, “How the Woman Makes the Man: Chaucer’s Reciprocal Figures in *Troilus and Criseyde*,” *New Perspectives on Criseyde*, ed. Cindy L. Vitto and Marcia Smith Marzec (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2004), 139–64; here 145.

<sup>21</sup> Note that this contention counters the standard view that Criseyde is the villain for losing faith with her lover, albeit within an unwilling liaison against which she fought repeatedly.

the morning following the consummation seems to gesture towards an act of violation of the private space of the bed, and perhaps of her body itself.<sup>22</sup>

Such a claim that the Pandarus-Troilus duo are violently coercive rather than courtly may at first glance seem counterintuitive, given the exalted nature of the language, courtly atmosphere, secretive love involvement, and Troilus's idealization of the specter of Criseyde which has infatuated him from his first glance. Barney contends,

*Troilus and Criseyde* seems to contain a romance in it, one constructed by Pandarus and lived by Troilus, and to reflect on the romantic conventions of intense private morality: loyalty, honor, truth, and knightly code. Both Troilus and Criseyde are more conscious of, and more troubled by, the chivalric codes of decency in love affairs than their counterparts in the *Filostrato*.<sup>23</sup>

Regardless of their concern with protocol, the masculine actions in the romance which initially propel it belie the charming words and ostensive courtesy and morality that Barney attests. Neither Pandarus nor Troilus can be called "noble." Deeds perpetrated by these two bring consequences—but rather than acknowledging their own responsibility, they lament their fate, blame Fortuna, and abdicate all accountability for the outcome. According to Gretchen Mieszkowski, two types of intermediaries inform medieval literature, the courtly and the sexual:

It would be unthinkable, however, for a go-between from this courtly tradition of idealized loving to trick or coerce someone into having sex. For the go-betweens of the stories of sexual conquest, on the other hand, tricking or forcing one of the couple into a sex act is ordinary behavior. They have no interest in distinguishing between love and lust, and most of them are hired to help men seduce women by any means necessary . . . the work at hand is contriving the physical possession of the other person, whether or not she consents . . . opposed conceptions of sexual relationships inform their stories.<sup>24</sup>

This brilliant observation is the basis for categorizing romances as courtly and noble or coercive and merely lustful, based on love or lust, concern or coercion.

Ironically, the historic and literary context of *Troilus and Criseyde* wherein the unwilling Criseyde is ravished, is the avenging of another ravished wife, Helen of Troy: "The ravysshynge to werken of Eleyne" (l.62) who may or may not have initially succumbed, but like Criseyde also became complicit over time. The male

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<sup>22</sup> Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 291.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen A. Barney, ed. *Troilus and Criseyde*, xiii. Quotations from *Troilus and Criseyde* derive from this edition.

<sup>24</sup> Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2.

avengers Hector, Achilles and Troilus battling Paris and the city of Troy are predominant, although the battle-scenes themselves recede into the background amidst more emotional, amatory concerns. When Criseyde is first introduced, she is pictured as

... in grete penaunce [misery]  
 For of hire lif she was ful sore in drede,  
 As she that nyste what was best to rede;  
 For bothe a widewe was she and allone  
 Of any frend to whom she dorste hir mone. (I.94–97)

Love is both an inspiration for and hindrance to chivalry, being the cause of fighting and the reward which justifies it; it sets males in competition, rivals to either capture or defend the female. The darker dichotomous side of what appears to be chivalric protection, then, is capturing the female, placing her in another's power. Criseyde's particular vulnerability places her at the mercy of masculine strength and power; needing protection in time of war, she must be "captured," made subservient, to be protected. However necessary for survival, this capture is not desired. Both a widow and daughter of a traitor, she must kneel before Hector to plead for her life: "With pitous vois, and tendrely wepyng, / His mercy bad, hirselves excusyng" (I.109–10). Hector chivalrously invites her to live with his family, but the effect is to situate her in a submissive place, as a guest, beholden to others: "And she hym thonked with ful humble chere, / And ofer wolde, and it hadde ben his wille" (I.124–25). When springtime celebrations begin, Criseyde is shy and retiring, not flirtatious or seductive. In her black mourning gown,

... she stood ful lowe, and stille allone,  
 Byhynden other folk, in litel brede, [space]  
 And neigh the dore, ay undre shames drede,  
 Simple of atir and debonaire of chere. (I.178–81)

She is not seeking love or attention, but Troilus spots her and is captivated; now he must capture her, whether she will or not. The man previously disdainful of love did not pursue it; now that love has fallen upon him, he actively chooses to do so: "Thus tok he purpos loves craft to suwe" (I.379)—a free choice not allowed Criseyde, given her vulnerable position. The nature of this love is clearly sexual, as he admits in his Song of Troilus: "And if that at myne owen lust I brenne, / From whennes cometh my waillyng and my pleynte?" (I.407–08). Enter Pandarus to hear his sorrowful love-longing, interrogate him as to the cause, accuse him of secrecy, and jump to action. Rather than cooling the flames of his passion, Pandarus merely inflames it, encourages it, plans how they might bring him "to blisse" (I.623). The collaboration and machinations of the two ganging up against the already vulnerable widow, and now fatherless Criseyde leave her defenseless. Peter Beidler is absolutely right in insisting that Criseyde "is reluctant from the

very first, wanting nothing to do with Troilus. When she finally consents to see him, she does so to mollify the son of her king and to save the life of her persistent uncle Pandarus."<sup>25</sup>

In the usual case, one man is the threat, and the other the defense and protector against him, thus setting up a rivalry, albeit an impossible situation for the woman. Once she accepts help, she is indebted to the second, and no better off than before, being saved from the ravages of the first. But for Criseyde, the situation is even worse: rather than rivals, the two are homosocially bonded, Pandarus vicariously enjoying Criseyde, and Troilus's satisfaction in her. Pandarus playfully lures his niece Criseyde into a sexual situation with him on a bed, under the sheets, to which she would never have acceded if asked. Her reproval takes the form of playfully (after all, she cannot offend her only male relative in Troy) reminding him about his other lover. He continues his erotic game through voyeurism, spying on the lovemaking of his niece, in whom he has expressed sexual interest, and his surrogate / alter ego Troilus. Criseyde is the ground on which they meet. A. C. Spearing rightly claims *Troilus and Criseyde* is

one of the poems that 'enquirent autrui amors', and it pushes the tradition still further, prying in greater depth and more detail than its predecessors into a secret love-affair and into the inner lives of its characters, creating a world that is pervaded with human subjectivity. . . . Curiosity and distance [in Greek antiquity] together create the possibility of voyeurism, but in *Troilus and Criseyde* they also add complexity to the notion of romances as narratives 'that pry into the loves of other folk', because the claims to personal inexperience and historical remoteness lead to a sharper and more explicit problematization of the means by which the private lives and loves of others can be known and told, brought under surveillance and reduced to narrative.<sup>26</sup>

Pandarus's voyeurism is manifested first when he cons her into accepting Troilus again, and second, when he watches and enjoys their love-making from a chair in the bedroom. As Sarah Stanbury points out, "*Troilus* is built on a system of private and reciprocal gazes that are centrally directed to the ends—and control—of Pandarus, the poem's supreme voyeur."<sup>27</sup> Such control and power over this vulnerable victim of harassment can only be seen as unchivalric coercion. The Lady has two ravagers and no protector from ravishment. When Pandarus discovers she is Troilus's passion, never does he suggest an open alliance to make an honest woman of his niece, but only furthers his friend's, and vicariously his own desire, colluding with him to deceive the needful young woman into

<sup>25</sup> Peter Beidler, "'That I was Born, Allas'; Criseyde's Weary Dawn Song" *Troilus and Criseyde*, *New Perspectives on Criseyde*, 255–76; here, 269.

<sup>26</sup> A. C. Spearing, *The Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love Narratives* (Cambridge, Eng. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 120, 121.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Stanbury, "The Voyeur and the Private Life in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 13(1991): 141–58; here 144.

compliance. With true male camaraderie, Pandarus warns lest “over-haste oure bothe labour shende” (I.972; “lest hasty action should both our work destroy”). He has created a conspiracy to master his own niece, and even promises Troilus his services to trick her. As Evan Carton so accurately reports, “The narrator’s disclaimers of control and responsibility, like Pandarus’ equivalent self-extrications, are the increasingly desperate evasions of a character who recognizes his deep complicity in a series of events that features seduction and culminates in betrayal . . . . Before he even knows the identity of Troilus’ lady, Pandarus has translated private and passive love-longing into a communal venture. This participatory impulse is reflected in the first-person pronoun that he habitually employs.”<sup>28</sup> This, of course, means “hotter weex his love” (I.1012). Knowing full well her natural reaction to such a coercive conspiracy, Troilus fears

Lest she be wroth—this drede I moost  
Or nyl nat here or trowen how it is [will not hear or believe how it is]  
Al this drede I, and ek for the manere [for propriety’s sake]  
Of the, hire em, she nyl no swich thyng here. (I.1019–22).

Clearly he realizes what he asks of her—not a relationship, but “encounters,” and until she submits, she will have no peace. Although Troilus asks no harm or “vilanye” come to Criseyde, Pandarus finds him much too scrupulous, concluding he himself will effect the love-making—with whatever it takes. Their pact against the unwitting Criseyde ends Book I.

Book II opens with an admission that Pandarus “Felt ek his part of loves shotes keene” (II.58), reinforcing the males’ shared homosocial bond through their mutual desire for Criseyde; he even dreams of the rape of Proigne / Procne, “How Tereus gan forth hire suster take,” (II.69), a prophetic foreshadowing of his incestuous play with Criseyde, and later voyeuristic incest. As Carton points out, Pandarus has allied with Troilus as Criseyde’s lover.<sup>29</sup> When Pandarus awakes, perhaps affected or titillated by it, he runs, not walks, to his niece’s castle, through the ambiguous Janus doors symbolizing his two-faced intent. Finding Criseyde, and dismissing her companions who are all reading Statius’s incestuous tale of Oedipus, he learns she has dreamed of him thrice last night. His reaction to her is to remove her concealing widow’s barbe (the neck and bosom covering), suggestively invite her to “shew youre face bare” (II.110) and ask her to dance: “lat us don to May [the season of fertility] som observaunce” (II.112). She responds: “Be ye mad? . . . Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave” (II.113, 116). Indeed, in his state of excitement, he does rave on, telling her entertaining tales and jokes, priming her for the revelation of which he only hints—“a thyng to doon yow

<sup>28</sup> Evan Carton, “Complicity and Responsibility in Pandarus’s Bed and Chaucer’s Art,” *PMLA* 94 (1979): 47–61; here 49.

<sup>29</sup> Carton, “Pandarus’ Bed,” 50.

pleye" (II.121)—to amuse or please you. His words can be paraphrased: "If you knew the revelation, there'd be no prouder woman in Troy" (II.138–39), he teases. Though she tries to discover the secret by asking of the war and Hector, he continues deferring his explanation (deferral being a well-known arousal technique), gradually hinting that Troilus can be seen as a love object. His manipulation intensifies when he pretends to depart, for she begs him to stay and reveal the secret. After proposing to dance again, prolonging the seduction scene, Criseyde realizes his ploy, saying

"A, wel bighought! [cleverly conceived] For love of God," quod she,  
 "Shal I not witen what ye meene of this?"  
 "No, this thing axeth leyser" [leisure], tho quod he,  
 "And ek me wolde muche greve, iwis,  
 If I it tolde and ye it toke amys.  
 Yet were it bet my tongue for to stille  
 Than seye a soth that were ayens youre wille." (II.225–31)

He is priming the pump, evoking her curiosity, insuring she will not take his message amiss, that it will not violate her will; he flatters her that she is the woman he loves most—except for paramours—and would not grieve he is clever but controlling deferral of information and mention of paramours adds a heightened sexual dimension, and provokes her to admit he is the man to whom she is most beholden . . . but she implores him to please TELL her the secret. This begging places her in a subservient position. When Pandarus kisses her, she casts her eyes down, and he coughs with feigned embarrassment. In true Ciceronian style, he tells her he will not delay, while in fact doing so. His entire behavior is a ruse to gain power over his niece.

Intently staring at her, Pandarus considers if he tells her his news, she will not like it, and will believe he deliberately deceived her. Intrigued, she responds that he stares as if he's never seen her before. He continues to defer his message, advising that when good fortune shines upon a person, one must willingly accept it or be blamed, so seize the day! Taking her hand, he claims to have her honor in mind. Yet he threatens that if she should refuse his dishonorable proposition, choosing rather the honorable behavior she prefers, he will never see her again. This coercive intimidation, no less than blackmail, usurps Criseyde's freedom—it is illegitimate and unwarranted.

However nicely he may put the case, this ultimatum finally removes her power of decision and right to refuse. Urging her to accept "aventure" (II.281), Pandarus continues his entreaty without naming it, promises to get to the point while prolonging his discourse, holds her hand and flatters her without revealing his intimate secret, draws her in with his eyes without speaking truth, admonishes her not to be aghast or quake without revealing why she might be, swears that if he thought it inappropriate, he would forbear; in every way he heightens her

anticipation through negative denial. His behavior of purposefully oxymoronic confusion is calculated to unsettle her equilibrium, the more easily to seduce her. Thus captivated, when Pandarus presents Troilus as the object of his prolonged tantalizing ruminations, Criseyde can do nothing but succumb. She has been emotionally man-handled, softened up, coerced into agreeing to her calculating uncle's importunities. He has countered her every objection before she knew the case—with gentle persuasion, the hardest to resist. Tearfully threatening to thrust a knife through his own throat, and vowing both men would guiltlessly die if she refuses her love, Pandarus manipulatively coerces her with a fine finesse. As Saunders astutely notes, "For Pandarus, the woman's consent negates ravishment: 'it is no rape' (IV.596). Yet the backdrop of the war and our knowledge of Troy's fate cannot but recall the disastrous social consequences of such an act. Troilus's response emphasises not only the war, and the need to obey the laws of parliament, but also the potential fear and shame even consensual ravishment might cause."<sup>30</sup>

Pandarus's outright fabrication then takes over, as he falsely insists that Troilus "naught desireth but your frendly cheere" (II.332). His analogies lock the woman in a most undesirable place, insecure and frightened, not wanting to be the fair but worthless gem, the unhealing herb, the pitiless beauty, the creature treading others under foot, all of which he enumerates. He fabricates "For me were levere thow and I and he / Were hanged than sholde ben his baude" [I would rather that we three be hanged than I be his pimp] (III.353–54), for he wouldn't rather that at all. All he asks, he duplicitously says, is to make Troilus better cheer: "God help me so, I nevere other mente" (II.364). Pandarus has pulled out all the stops in his uncourtly psychological seduction as Troilus's Pander.

Well, not quite all. Next he sets up straw arguments to knock down; if men saw Troilus come from your home, he posits, they would think it merely friendship. And since he would come so seldom, who would notice? "Swych love of frendes regneth al this town . . . So let your daunger sucred [disdain sweeten] ben alite / That of his deth ye be naught for to wite" (II.379, 384–85). Thus he culminates his tirade by offering her guilt should he die of "luvsiknesse." The length of time his entreaty persists amounts to emotionally battering Criseyde, effecting her equally long worrisome ruminations. She first asks "What is your reed [advice] I sholde don of this?" (II.389), clearly feeling pressure to please him. Her uncle importunes her to love Troilus back, appealing to her vanity and fear of old age lest "crowes feet be growe under youre yē" (II. 403):

Think ek how elde waseth ever houre  
In ech of yow a partie of beautee  
And therefore er that age the devoure,

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<sup>30</sup> Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, 290.



Go love; for old, the wol no wight of the. (II.393–94)

Barney translates the proverb as “Go love; for (when you are) old, at that point no person will want you”<sup>31</sup> which leads her “to brest a-wepe anoon” (II.408) and bemoan:

... Allas, for wo! Why nere I deed?  
 For of this world the feyth is al agoon.  
 Allas, what sholden straunge to me doon,  
 Whan he that for my beste frend I wende  
 Ret me to love, and sholde it me defende? . . .  
 This false world—allas!—who may it leve? (II.409–13, 420)

[Alas, for woe, Why am I not dead  
 For in this world faith is all gone.  
 Alas, what might strangers do to me  
 When he I thought my best friend  
 Advises me to love, who should prohibit me? . . .  
 This false world, alas, who may believe it?]

Her distraught monologue, as elaborate as her conniving uncle’s diatribe, proves how completely his shocking advice contradicts her sense of moral and social decorum—“For so astoned am I that I deye” (II.427). His unfeeling, brash retort does not let her off the hook, as he continues to exclaim “That wikkedly ye don us bothe dye” (II.441) until “she wel neigh starf for feere” (II.449). Such unremitting coercion reminiscent of modern date rape, makes a mockery of freely chosen sexual love. She admits “I wol doon my payne; I shal myn herte ayeins my lust constreyne” (II.475–76)—in a passage Barney glosses as:

Nor can or may I love a man against my will—but apart from this (*elles*) I will try, as long as my honor is preserved, to please him from day to day. In this connection, I would not have denied (your request) once, except that I was afraid in my imaginings—but where the cause may cease, ever the disease will cease . . . [because the cause of her fear—that Pandarus may ask her to perform dishonorably—has ceased, the fear itself ceases.]<sup>32</sup>

Criseyde’s fearful imagination is well evidenced by the nature of her dream, as Saunder’s well interprets: “Criseyde’s dream, of the eagle tearing out her heart without pain, offers a similar emblem in its interweaving of violence and pleasure, force and consent. The notion of violence is reiterated in the image of the ensnared bird employed by the narrator in the consummation scene . . . an image that echoes the narrator’s helplessness, but also corresponds to the image of Criseyde trembling ‘Right as an aspes leef’ (III.1200) [Such images] create a sense of

<sup>31</sup> Barney, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 83, n.7.

<sup>32</sup> Barney, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 87, n.2.

Criseyde herself as victim in a world of violence and violation, and thus to redress in another way the blackening of her character by successive generations of writers."<sup>33</sup> Criseyde's intention is absolutely clear—out of fear and integrity, she will act honorably while pleasing Troilus—but take no other form of pity on him lest she lose her honor. The strength of her convictions is apparent in her carefully articulated, very determined speech:

And here I make a protestacioun  
That in this proces if ye depper go,  
That certeynly, for no salvacioun  
Of yow, though that ye sterven [die] bothe two,  
Though al the world on o day be my fo,  
Ne shal I nevere of hym han other routhe [pity]. (II.484–89)

As Saunders rightly concludes, "[T]he fear of ravishment equates with fear of rape, and Criseyde's words restate the enduring belief, which Chaucer so vividly conveys in his legend of Lucrece, that physical violation even against the will results in irremediable shame. Criseyde's attempt to maintain her physical honour, however, leads only to the shame of betrayal."<sup>34</sup> Pandarus, denying his niece's fear and concern, only pretends to accept her stipulation. To defy the wishes of a woman who makes such a decisive proclamation is indeed sexual violation. Although he responds: "I Graunte wel . . . by my trowthe" (II.490), he fails to keep his bargain, breaking his trouthe. Indeed, Criseyde curiously asks of Troilus's involvement without intent to weaken her resolve, but Pandarus "a litel gan to smyle" (II.505); this smirk reveals he is assuming a chink in her armor, a vulnerability. Subtly he creates a fabricated scenario of the pale, wan, Troilus, love-swooning, crying—"I woot that I moot nedes deyen" (536)—by which to lure the lady. Then he pleads innocence: "For for to save his lif, and elles nought, / And to noon harm of yow, thus am I dryven . . . I non yvel meene" (II.575–76, 581). Pandarus's appeal to wisdom—he claims the two fit together so well and Troilus is such a good catch—follows, but the lady resists, saying "ye shenden every deel" (II. 590) [you spoil everything!].

When he leaves, Criseyde rushes to her room to contemplate, astonished at the situation. Pandarus's words have affected her, however: he has planted the seeds that make her emotionally vulnerable. After Troilus's successful battle, he rides past her house causing Criseyde to recall his interest in her, blush, and retire to the inside of the house for very shame. The narrator takes particular pains to exonerate her of loving too soon, without reflection, and attributes her growing affection to Venus who is disposed to help Troilus. Sitting alone in her room, she "heng hire hed ful lowe" (II.689) in shame and grief, ruminating over her course

<sup>33</sup> Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, 291–92.

<sup>34</sup> Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, 291.

of action. But she convinces herself that "Men may love, of possibilite, / A womman so, his herte may tobreste [burst], / And she nought love ayein [back], but if hire leste" (II.607–09). She still has her wits about her, and reasons rightly at this point, even claiming "I am myn owene womman" (II.750) without need of a husband. Besides the social stigma, she also considers her own desires: "Allas! Syn I am free, Should I now love, and put in jupartie / My sikernessee, and thrallen [enslave] libertee? [II.771–71]. Furthermore, mistrust and strife mark love, and "wikked tonges ben so prest [ready] / To speke us harm; ek men ben so untrew" (II.785–86) that as soon as they get what they want, they find someone new. Treachery, as Criseyde emphasizes, is often done to women, and how hard she would have to work to squelch gossip, and cajole those "that they seye noon harm of me!" (II.801). Her mind is made up. But the longer the men in her life assume otherwise, that she will love, the more likely she is to accept their view of what is appropriate for her.

This manipulative sort of brainwashing is anything but subtle. Beidler points out that she is not the only widow in that situation, noting

references to the story of Thebes, which has in its background the fact that Jocasta does not know whom she gives herself to in bed, suggest that Chaucer may want us to imagine at least general parallels between the doings of both the Theban widow Jocasta and the Theban wife Alcmena with those of the Trojan widow Criseyde. For each woman fate has in store a sexual liaison with a man whom she would probably not in normal circumstances, consider as a lover.<sup>35</sup>

When her niece Antigone sings a lovesong, and discusses her view of the nature of love, all of Criseyde's defenses are questioned, however. Meanwhile, Pandarus describes the work of his gradual seduction for Troilus this way: "I have thi werk bigonne / Fro day to day, til this day by the morwe / Hire love of frendshipe have I to the wonne" (I.960–62). Pandarus then dictates how Troilus should write his letter—not pridefully, formally, too elaborately or artistically, with just a bit of tenderness but no discordance, for him to bring to his niece. The dignified love letter uses all the right phrases, calls her his heart's life, recommends himself—whom she has never met—to her, prayed she be not angry for boldly writing since love made him do it, and "pitousli gan mercy for to crye" (II.1076). The scene for the seduction has been set. The narrator immediately admits "And after that he seyde—and leigh ful loude—[lied quite openly, claiming . . .] / Himself was litel worth, and less he koude (II.1076–78; He could do even less than his small reputation implied).

When her uncle visits the maid the next morning, he brings her out of earshot

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<sup>35</sup> Beidler, "'That I was Born, Allas'; Criseyde's Weary Dawn Song," 266.

of all others, to deliver her letter privately—that “no man heren myghte” (II.1119)—and to elicit one in return. His first lure is to call Troilus “al holy youres free” (II.1121) and claim certain death for him were she not to provide “som goodly answer” (II.1125). Bravely she refuses the letter and the man, demanding Pandarus’s respect: “to my estat have more reward [regard], I preye, / Than to his lust! What sholde I more seye?” (II.33–34). She asks if it is appropriate to her state to submit sexually, and because of Pandarus’s promise to Troilus, for her to have pity on him while harming herself. Tell Troilus that! Pandarus’s rejoinder is slippery: Now would he bring her a dangerous letter? Pandarus says Criseyde doesn’t care whether Troilus lives or dies. His gesture is even more sexually aggressive: he seizes her firmly “and in hire bosom the lettre down he thraste” (II.1155). With a smile, she pertly advises him to answer Troilus himself: “Swich answer as yow list, youreself purveye, / For trewely I nyl no lettre write” (II.1160–62). The bantering tone does not disguise their contention or her anxiety. Which kind of Go-Between is Pandarus, then, a courtly or a bawdy one? Mieszkowski suggests neither:

Uniquely, however, Chaucer’s Pandarus fits in neither tradition. He is the offspring of the double tradition itself, an impossible amalgam of the conflicting conventions. As the lady’s relative and the lover’s best friend, Pandarus is an ordinary idealized go-between by position and situation, and that is the first role he plays: counseling the lover, comforting him in his yearning, carrying messages back and forth between the lover and the lady, and helping the couple spend time together. On the other hand, essential aspects of his actions violate the fundamental conventions of going between for idealized love.<sup>36</sup>

Those manipulative, coercive violations of amatory convention undermine his honesty, his courtly reputation, and his decency toward his vulnerable niece, desperately fighting for her integrity, with a patriarchal stranglehold on her life and reputation.

When Pandarus offers to write what she dictates, she claims she can write herself, but doesn’t know what to write. He suggests she just say thanks, not let him die, and not refuse his prayer this time—three requests monumentally mushrooming, one from the next. Under her uncle’s pressure, she succumbs, but with reservations:

She thanked hym of al that he wel mente  
Towardes hire, but holden hm in honde  
She nolde nought, ne make hireselven bonde

In love; but as his suster, hym to plese,  
She wolde fayn to doon his herte an ese. (II.1221–25)

<sup>36</sup> Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, 3.

She will neither cajole him with false hopes nor bind herself in love, but comfort him as a sister, thus losing no dignity or autonomy. But even this much commitment is coercive as she tells Pandarus: "As wisly [surely] helpe me God the grete, / I nevere did thing with more payne / Than writen this, to which ye me constreyned" (II.1230–32). The lady is not acting from free volition. But Pandarus pushes harder, insisting, in Barney's words, "Now cease, so that you no longer remain undecided, even though you wish to preserve the appearance of aloofness."<sup>37</sup> She is NOT undecided, but he has determined to convince her she is. When Troilus rides by the house, Criseyde withdraws until Pandarus insists she come out lest he think she is avoiding him.

To stir her guilt, Pandarus then asks: is a woman guilty of death if she denies pity to a dying knight? When Troilus comes into view, Pandarus claims: ". . . as I have told yow thrie, / Lat be your nyce [fastidiousness] shame and youre folie, / And spek with hym in esying of his herte; / Lat nycete [scrupulosity] nat do yow bothe smerte [pain]" (II.1285–88). Although this brow-beating continues, Criseyde remains strong in her intentions:

For pleylnly hire entente, as seyde she,  
Was for to love hym unwist, if she myght  
And guerdoun him with nothing but sight. (II. 1293–95)

On the other hand, in a battle of wills, Pandarus obstinately claims "It shal nought be so, / Yif that I may; this nyce opynyoun shal nought be holden fully yeres two" (II.1296–98). Toward that end, he advises Troilus to appeal to her pity, show her his pain in private, "For in good herte, it mot som routhe impresse, / To here and see the giltles in distresse" (II.1371–72). Such plan the crafty Pandarus effects by falsely telling Criseyde she is being sued by Poliphete, and inviting her to dinner at Troilus's brother Deiphebus's house for help. She fails to see that lie, just as Deiphebus fails to see Pandarus's lie, that someone has stolen Criseyde's possessions. "But only God and Pandare wist al what this [plan] mente" (II.1561). Since Troilus feigns sickness lying in bed at Deophebus's home, Pandarus suggests Criseyde tell Troilus of her stolen property—a perfect opportunity for her seduction. When Criseyde is ushered in to Troilus's room on Pandarus's arm like a lamb to its slaughter, she is unaware of the men's intention. Her uncle asks her to consider what plight Troilus is in for her sake, and since no one suspects anything between them, she is safe from scrutiny. Barney interprets Pandarus's remark as "While people are blinded (deceived), lo, all the time is gained; i.e. the iron is hot."<sup>38</sup> The expectation is upon her.

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<sup>37</sup> Barney, ed. *Troilus and Criseyde*, 131, n.7.

<sup>38</sup> Barney, ed. *Troilus and Criseyde*, 147, n.9.

Troilus's halting and embarrassed manner is a most effective lure—he appears non-threatening, genuine, vulnerable to her, non-aggressive. His first words to her “Mercy, mercy, sweet herte!” (III.98) are a plea rather than a threat. His claim that he is hers, and will be until his death, seemingly a gift, is actually a responsibility. Troilus's statement, if this offends Criseyde, may his death appease her, embodies a threat of his death, clearly coercing her. Meanwhile, Pandarus stands there weeping, poking Criseyde, and uttering “for love of God, make of this thing an ende, / Or sle us both at ones er ye wende” (III.118–19). A confused and distraught Criseyde claims “I not [know] nat what ye wilne [wish] that I seye” (III.121). Pandarus replies “That ye han on hym routhe [pity]” (III.122)—offering cumulative instances of coercion that leaves the Lady no room for choice. She again seeks confirmation or reassurance about this ambiguous language: “I wolde hym preye / To telle me the fyn of his entente, / Yet wist I nevere wel what that he mente” (III.124–26). Troilus's double-talk does not clarify his intent, for what does he *mean* by saying that “Ye wolde somtyme frendly on me see [look on me favorably], / And thanne agreeen that I may be he / Withouten braunche [type] of vice on any wise, / In trouthe alwey to don you my service”? (III.130–33). Although he would be her diligent, obedient, servant, promising his discretion sounds distinctly suspicious! Pandarus then intrudes with

Were I a god, ye sholden sterve as yerne [die quickly]  
That heren wel this man woll nothing yeren  
Bot youre honour, and sen hym almost sterve,  
And ben so loth to suffren [permit] hym yow serve. (III.151–54)

Such strong words are more than intimidating. Criseyde has no freedom to choose love, for it has been chosen for her by two men who claim to love her—a pawn in their homosocial relationship. Can it be called anything but rape? Peggy Knapp calls hers “the stern story of a woman traded by her uncle and then by her *polis*.”<sup>39</sup> Her response is still to resist, albeit politely: “Myn honour sauf, I wol wel trewely, / And in swich forme as he gan now devyse, / Receyven hym fully to my servyse” (III.159–610. Her deference is modified by her reservations: “But natheles, this warne I yow,’ quod she, / ‘A kynges sone although ye be, ywys, / Ye shal namore han sovereignete / Of me in love, than right in that cas is” (III.169–72).

Pandarus admits to Troilus that he is playing the game of go-between without using the word “baud” or “pimp,” but in his mind, that is his ploy; he asks only that Troilus protect her name—not her honor—lest he be a traitor to her, and that he “holden secree swich an heigh matere” (III.286). As Mieszkowski suggests, such a baud “first tries to persuade the young woman to accept the man—‘Seize the day

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<sup>39</sup> Peggy A. Knapp, “Criseyde’s Beauty: Chaucer and Aesthetics,” *New Perspectives on Criseyde*, 231–54; here, 251.

while you can! Before long no one will want you’.”<sup>40</sup> He is underhanded and scheming throughout their conversation. Mieszkowski continues, noting “Their first meeting requires a comically complex script with precisely timed entrances, exits, and cues to support more lies than could possibly have been needed. The effect of all this subterfuge is to deliver Criseyde—without her consent, under blatantly false pretenses—into a room that contains only Troilus, in bed . . . . Pandarus, however, does not scheme against lovers’ opponents. He schemes against Criseyde, and his schemes are designed to put her in a situation that will make her accept Troilus as her lover.”<sup>41</sup>

The degree of secrecy to which the lovers swear must indicate the nature of the violation of her character within that society. Troilus and Criseyde speak little, and quietly, of plans to meet, although the nature of the meeting remains unspoken. Soon, Pandarus “with gret deliberacioun” (III.519) plans and executes their meeting on a lightless night with rain expected by inviting Criseyde for dinner. Before accepting, she asks if Troilus would be there, and he swears not, that he is out of town: “rather than men myght hym ther asprie, / Me were levere a thousand fold to dye” (III.573–74). When she reminds him that she depends on his trust, he reaffirms his vow: “Yis, by stokkes and by stones, / And by the goddes that in hevene dwelle (III.589–90). Meanwhile Troilus eavesdrops through a little closet window. When Criseyde starts to leave, smoky drenching rain detains her: “. . . every womman that was there / Hadde of that smoky reyn a verray feere” (III.627–28). Her uncle convinces her to stay the night; “But Pandarus, if goodly hadde he myght, [could have done so decently] / He wolde han hyed [hurried] hire to bedde fayn [gladly]” (III.653–54). After they retire, however, “he thought he wolde upon his werk bigynne” (III.697), unlatches the door, and brings a nervous Troilus to her by the trap door. The lady becomes upset, crying “Lat me som wight calle! / I! God forbode that it shoulde falle” (III. 760–61), a clear sign of rejection. Sneaky Pandarus warns that her cry will cause suspicion, and claims Troilus has arrived in a state of madness, jealous of a fabricated lover. She retorts, “Why hastow Troilus mad to me untriste, / That nevere yet agylte hym, that I wiste?” (III.839–40). Pandarus calls her bluff, reminding her she could put a stop to all this if she’d like—and recommending it. ““And so shal I do to-morwe, ywys, quod she” (III.848), fearing she was over-reacting. Just let him stay tonight, he cajoles, continuing “Ye ben to wys to doon so gret folie, / To putte his lif al nyght in jupertie” (III.867–68). Wishing she never believed him, she confirms her lack of collusion:

If ich al nyght wolde hym in sorwe se,  
For al the tresour in the town of Troie,

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<sup>40</sup> Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, 4.

I bidde God I nevere mote have joie.

(III.873–75)

This definitive statement makes her attitude about sexual activity perfectly plain. Unfortunately, she is ignored, disregarded, disrespected, and taken advantage of, if not outright raped. No doubt the dramatic events that follow dwarf the importance of Criseyde's battle with the males in her life—even her uncle, of whom Carton says “has interpreted the game of ‘love-longing’ for Troilus or for anyone, and has graphically imagined his own role in its achievement”<sup>42</sup>—distracting even an attentive audience from her justified resentment, lack of commitment, and concern for her well-being. Her later actions, leaving the source of her unacknowledged oppression for kinder and freer environs, are wholly legitimate, and psychologically valid, not the actions of a traitorous unfaithful lover, as some have maintained.

Winthrop Weatherby points to “the overwhelming pressure of the male fantasy that has idealized her beauty and reduced her social and physical status to that of an attractive object, a piece to be pursued and taken in the game of love.”<sup>43</sup> That is just the beginning. The coercive treatment accorded her by her male comrades who say they have her best interests at heart are, however, sufficient to justify her removal from the source of the conflict. Clearly, Chaucer has placed Criseyde in this vulnerable position, abused by two males who claim to love her, but in fact are using her for their own purposes. Although her blood relative reveals the most assertive demeanor toward her, both men participate in a kind of homosocial relationship which places her between them as the pawn forging their own liaison. Mieszkowski explains their malfeasance by noting “it is their tradition that accounts for the ruses and lies that yield Criseyde's seduction—those crucial elements of Pandarus's role that are altogether foreign to the idealized go-between's supportive befriending. Pandarus's standard remedies for the difficulties of courting Criseyde derive from the stories of lust and sexual conquest: a lie or a trick or a network of lies and tricks.”<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, tradition and the historic context of the fourteenth century collude to capture Criseyde and exonerate her captors. As Kathryn Gravdal reports, in the nineteenth century, “it was commonly held that in these poems and romances the feminine constituted a new cultural ideal according to which female characters were empowered and revered. What was left unsaid was that courtly love literature is not only obsessed with an idea called ‘Woman,’ it is also obsessed with an idea called ‘Ravishment.’ Medieval literature ceaselessly repeats the moment

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<sup>42</sup> Carton, “Pandarus' Bed,” 50.

<sup>43</sup> Winthrop Weatherby, “Criseyde Alone,” *New Perspectives on Criseyde*, 299–332; here, 299.

<sup>44</sup> Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, 3.



in which an act of violence makes sexual difference into subordination"<sup>45</sup> Criseyde's is the epitomé of such abuse.

Recognizing Criseyde's literary-historic position, traditionally seen as traitoress to Troilus, Chaucer has heightened her verbal maltreatment to absurdity in his version to convey his disdain for that superficial and unjust interpretation. This view is radically opposed to Henryson's fifteenth-century continuation of Criseyde's fate in *Testament of Cresseid*<sup>46</sup>—a heartless and unsympathetic punishment for her supposed infidelity, never acknowledging Pandarus's and Troilus's subtle but insistent manipulative coercion. But as Classen points out, this is a somewhat widespread phenomenon: "Indeed, whenever we come across especially powerful women characters, such as Brunhild in the anonymous *Nibelungenlied*, or the garrulous, calculating, and very self-assertive Wife of Bath in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, ultimately we seem to observe their radical subjugation, at times tantamount to rape, leaving them behind as mere shadows of their previous female identity and self."<sup>47</sup>

Heterosexual love is thus both an inspiration for chivalry and a hindrance to its success: the very act of placing the feminine in contention between two masculines simultaneously creates both rivalry between the two and opportunity for each to defend her from the rival. What appears to be chivalric protection has a darker side, in its capturing of the female to achieve that protection. Within medieval romance, sexuality and even rape play a pre-eminent role in narrative action, as Gravdal points out:

The spectacle of violence against women is made tolerable as it is made literary. Medieval law patterns itself after medieval literature in the cultivation of textual practices that rationalize male violence against women . . . . The cultural habit of conceptualizing male violence against women as a positive expression of love is both evoked and grounded in these [medieval French] texts . . . . But it is crucial to ask of a historical period whose literature is enthusiastically given over to the idea of Woman: why the is rape a stock device in so many genres and what is the relation genre bears to gender?<sup>48</sup>

Gravdal's inquiry is valid for the whole of medieval literature, not just twelfth-century French works. The stock devise of rape is indeed prevalent, perhaps given sanction by earlier religious and classical precedent. In twelfth-century canon law, as in literary texts, we see a blurring of distinctions between forced and voluntary

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<sup>45</sup> Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*. New Cultural Studies Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 11.

<sup>46</sup> *Testament of Cresseid*, ed. Robert L. Kindrick, *The Poems of Robert Henryson* (Kalamazoo, MI: Teams, Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 156–74. Rpt. *Troilus and Criseyde: Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 429–47.

<sup>47</sup> Classen, *The Power of a Woman's Voice*, 74.

<sup>48</sup> Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 20–21.

sex, between love and violence. [Further] . . . “The mimesis of rape is made tolerable when the poet tropes it as moral, comic, heroic, spiritual, or erotic.”<sup>49</sup> Although the way moderns construct the Middle Ages is heavily influenced by our own historic context, sexual attitudes, rape, and even salvation found in variously styled “romances” such as *Troilus and Criseyde* clearly operate in an ambiguous, multilateral fashion that undercuts prior idealization of the genre.

Those Middle English pieces styled “metrical romances” also display surprising signs of violence and sexual aggression against women. As Donald B. Sands suggests, without “humanizing and magnanimous inner weakness”<sup>50</sup> possessed by romance heroes to teach them success and glory, these heroes are simply ordinary men and women who happen to be the object of a tale and may perform dastardly deeds, often without direct narrative comment. Their sexual relationships are equally fraught. Just as Chaucer never directly upbraids Pandarus, Troilus, or Criseyde for their sexual behaviors, but reveals their flaws through their actions, so the *Athelston*-author allows few interpolations into his text, letting the tale speak for itself. This anonymous mid-fourteenth-century Middle English tale is a romance of ordinary men performing dolorous deeds, but unlike the subtle, understated, and ambiguous actions of *Troilus and Criseyde*, the vehemence, violence, and downright evil glare out at the audience in treachery and rape: “Of falsnesse, hou it will ende” (l.8).<sup>51</sup> As Sands comments “Its world is elemental, brutish, and bloody. There is nothing to do with enchantment or courtly love. It convinces again because, once set in motion, it hurtles along unchecked until its horrendous end.”<sup>52</sup>

The romance actually starts out innocuously enough, privileging “foure weddid bretherin” (l. 10) one of whose uncles dies to leave him king. Not even of direct filial descent, this newly crowned Athelston has done little to merit such rank. Nevertheless, he accepts his crown and generously shares his power with his equally dubiously worthy brethren, his poor brother Wymound, now the Earl of Dover, Alryke the clerk, now Bishop of Canterbury, and his newly married brother-in-law, Egelond, Earl of Stane. This liaison is arranged by Athelston who “gaf [Egelond] till his weddid wif / His owne sustri, Dame Edif, / With gret devocioun” (46–48). The devotion is apparently for Egelond, not Countess Edif, who is not privy to the arrangement. Sex, then is a business arrangement,

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<sup>49</sup> Gravdel, *Ravishing Maidens*, 11, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Donald B. Sands, ed. *Middle English Verse Romances* (New York, Chicago, et al.: Rinehart and Winston, 1966, 7.

<sup>51</sup> This and all subsequent quotations from *Athelston* derive from Sands, *Middle English Verse Romance*.

<sup>52</sup> Sands, *Middle English Verse Romances*, 130.

conducted by men and for men, and lacking any emotional base or consideration for the wife's choice.

But the treacherously jealous Wymound resents Athelston's affection for the fertile couple and their sons, and deceptively tells Athelston they will overthrow him, their benefactor. Without proof, Athelston immediately accepts the truth of this putative disloyalty, that his brother-in-law Egelond "wol thee poison right slyly" (166) and plans revenge when he hears "Sodainly thanne shalt thou dy" (167). Soon his pregnant sister and Egelond are called to King Athelston under pretense of knighting their sons; all are shocked as instead he imprisons and threatens them with drawing and quartering; but the imprisonment of his pregnant sister is most abhorrent. Lacking chivalry, Athelston fails to investigate the charges, but rushes to punish. His compassionate wife the also-pregnant Queen then tries to defend her sister-in-law, but to no avail: first he kicks his wife's belly: "With his foot he wolde nought wonde. / He slough the child right in here wombe" (282–83). This brutal treatment suggests pregnant women and near-term children garner no respect, even in late-term stages, and are no more than fodder to be kicked.

As an aside, this is almost exactly the same destiny suffered by the eponymous heroine in the contemporary romance *Königin Sibille* (Queen Sibille), extant in Spanish, French, and German where Charlemagne's wife, though pregnant, is threatened by her husband with the death penalty because of an actually ridiculous suspicion that she might have committed adultery with an ugly dwarf while he spent time in mass.<sup>53</sup>

Mere vessels to house and convey progeny, women are granted no rights and esteemed of no value within their homes. Further, his killing of their child indicates Athelston disdains his own sexually conceived progeny, and has no regard for his offspring, to say nothing of his wife, his sexual companion. As Susan Crane notes of *King Horn*, "In love Rigmel is the suppliant, as she will be in marriage the social dependent."<sup>54</sup> The same may be said for most metrical romance hierarchies, since women are generally placed in the subservient, dependent role, as *Athelston* well exemplifies. Although "Insular poets demonstrate in many ways that they are aware of courtly tradition and committed to producing idealized, inspiring version of political heroism that located conflict in aberrant forces challenging hero and community together,"<sup>55</sup> as Crane contends, this awareness

<sup>53</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Women in 15th-Century Literature: Protagonists (Melusine), Poets (Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken), and Patrons (Mechthild von Österreich)," *"Der Buchstab tödt - der Geist macht lebendig". Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Hans-Gert Roloff*, ed. by James Hardin and Jörg Jungmayr. Vol. I (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 1992), 431–58.

<sup>54</sup> Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), 34.

<sup>55</sup> Crane, *Insular Romance*, 137.

does not blunt the harshness of their sexually explicit narrative events, cruelty, and violence specifically aimed against women. Is the impulse to violence an instance of sublimation of sexual desires? The preponderance of pregnancies suggests otherwise. In this brutal romance, courtly behavior and chivalric treatment play a distinctly minor role in respecting both the feminine and its sexual ramifications, as sublimating violence is never seen.

On the other hand, certain medieval romances often present the amatory life in all its complications—neither derogatory nor idealized,<sup>56</sup> but drawn from life experience. However, we cannot ignore the powerfully influential phenomenon of courtly love. W. T. H. Jackson describes, in the romance tradition,

the tendency to show the lady as being of superior qualities whose love inspires rather than degrades her lover . . . [although such view differs] from the widespread medieval view that sexual love was essentially a degrading experience in most of its manifestations . . . . Such an account [of sexual attitudes] must be based almost entirely on works written by men—and very occasionally by women—who belonged to a specific school of thought [of religious conservatism] . . . . The Virgin Birth of Christ, which removed him from the stain of original sin, shows of itself the strong anti-sexual tendency of Christianity and set for others an ideal impossible of attainment.<sup>57</sup>

The ecclesiastical tension between acceptance of erotic love as an ennobling act and rejection of it as sinfully debasing behavior is reiterated in the literary tradition. Nevertheless, some tales posit an idealism in portraying heroic, faithful love. While they are not three-dimensional, realistic characters, many are idealized, as are Biblical, classical or non-western heroes such as Moses, Achilles, Roland, or Buddha.

In contrast, the tale of *Tristan and Isolt*, in its many instantiations, stands out as the epitomé of courtliness, tenderness, respect for women, and *gentillesse*. Thus, eroticism is not merely debased in all romances—but quite the contrary. As

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<sup>56</sup> Marie de France, for instance portrays love and loyalty in somewhat counter-cultural ways, not necessarily privileging marital relationships over true love and sometimes deprecating them in her *Lais*; genuine affection and bonding supercede legalistic marital contracts, especially with a particularly old, jealous, or confining mate. The entire fabliaux genre likewise denigrates the marital bond; in these tales, a powerful socially superior male (or female) is brought low in a Bakhtinian reversal of social authority, as I have argued elsewhere (“The Non-Conformist Genre and Its Transgressions: A Bakhtinian Analysis of Two Old French Fabliaux,” *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy [Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2007], 120–33), with sex being the bed on which deception is laid out. Love seems a superfluous irrelevancy in these tales. For a slightly different perspective, however, see Lisa Perfetti, “The Lewd and the Ludic: Female Pleasure in the Fabliaux,” *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A Crocker. Foreword by R. Howard Bloch. Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2006), 17–31.

<sup>57</sup> W. T. H. Jackson, *The Anatomy of Love: The Tristan of Gottfried von Strassburg* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971), 2, 3.

Douglas Kelly says of Old French romance, "Aristocratic ideals also included 'the kindling of love'—Dante's *accensio amoris*—. . . . At the end of the thirteenth century, Dante identified those ideals as prowess in arms, noble love, and rectitude . . . a noble context for romance as well as for lyric."<sup>58</sup> Sands agrees, claiming "Romance characters tend to be nonpareils: they are paragons of beauty, goodness, evil, saintliness"<sup>59</sup>—in other words, they are larger-than-life. This statement may be more true of the *Tristan and Isolt* tales than of others. The Middle English version of *Sir Tristrem* is most justly compared to *Troilus and Criseyde*, both emerging from the same literary tradition, national consciousness (the Pictish/Welsh/Irish/Cornish of its origin being closer to Chaucer's British than say, French or German), date,<sup>60</sup> and perhaps mind-set. Furthermore, the parodic comedy of *Sir Tristrem* in many ways parallels that of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Other correspondences can be found in the circumstances of the lovers' lives, the difficulties of their problems, and the hardships in overcoming or accommodating to them. Neither women were immediately interested in their lovers. Both had a prohibition against their love. Both couples endured a forced separation. The males traveled across waters—the exile-and-return theme. Both needed an enforced secrecy from the world. Two males—Pandarus and Mark are in charge of all proceedings. Both women are forced to leave their homes against their wills. The journey brings each new amatory interests which neither want at first. Both are heavily wooed—with songs or letters. In both cases, an older male is the surrogate for the younger—Mark and Pandarus substitute for Tristrem and Troilus. Deception—of roles or identities—is a major theme in both tales—the only way to effect the couples' goals. Both Tristrem and Troilus pretend to be something they are not—innocent pilgrim or innocent friend. The most significant difference between the two lies in the nature of love exhibited by the characters, particularly the males. Troilus's love is grasping, seeking, needing, and possessive; Tristrem's is appreciative, supportive, nurturing, and giving.

Using evidence of the true love and selfless devotion of the male protagonist in *Sir Tristrem*<sup>61</sup> as a contrast to the manipulation and selfish desire of the male

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<sup>58</sup> Douglas Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 114, 208, 114.

<sup>59</sup> Donald B. Sands, ed. *Middle English Verse Romances*, 7.

<sup>60</sup> See Alan Lupack, ed. *Launcelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*. EAMS Middle English Texts Series 1994 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1994), 143, who notes two Ur-Tristan texts, the *common* (Eilhart von Oberg's *Tristan* and Beroul's *Roman de Tristan*) of the latter half of the twelfth century, and the *courtly* (Thomas's *Tristan*, Brother Robert's Old Norse *Tristrams saga ok Isöndar*, and Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*). "The Middle English *Sir Tristrem*, written late in the thirteenth century," was derived from Thomas's poem.

<sup>61</sup> Critical evaluation of *Sir Tristrem* has been sparse. See Lupak's annotated bibliography of five discussions, and thirty seven entries in my section on *Sir Tristrem* in *Ten Middle English Arthurian Romances: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1987), 55–65.

protagonist in *Troilus and Criseyde* reveals quite a different slant on the later poem's usual critical reputation. The first 1350 lines of *Sir Tristrem* are totally devoted to Tristrem until jealous barons, fearing his accession, suggest that the nephew bring Ysonde of Irlond to Mark, to provide wife and heir (l. 1353). Similarly, the audience focuses on and shares Troilus's adventures for some time before he encounters Criseyde. Since a steward seeks her love, Tristrem must prove he, rather than the steward, killed the dragon and won her attention, thus enhancing her value. Already he is attracting her admiration, for

Tristrem spak as a knight,  
He wold prove it anough.  
So noblelich he hem hight,  
Therof Ysonde lough [laughed]  
That tide.

(1534–38)

Tristrem's engagement appears genuine, for he passionately claims he will warrant his dragon-slaying deed with "His schoppe and al his prude" (1540). Furthermore, before a winner can kiss Ysonde, Tristrem claims, he will have to prove his victory over the dragon, and Tristrem will ride against him with might, prompting Ysonde to speculate "Allas that thou ner knight!" (1551; ". . . are not a knight) for she thinks him a mere messenger. Her growing affection now takes the form of administering him a bath and a potent drink. But discovering his true identity—not Tramtris but Tristrem who killed her uncle—she would slay him. Tristrem, however, with the support of her father the King, dissuades her, saying Moraunt would have done the same had he been able. "And ever Tristrem lough [smiled] / On swete Isonde the bright" (1596–97), recalling three things: 1) he had taught her harping and singing; 2) he had diligently spoken on her behalf to King Mark so "that after the [you / Isonde] he gan long" (1612); and 3) Mark will make her England's queen as compensation for her uncle's death. His pact is sworn. Wooing for Mark and even himself takes the form of kind and gentle reminders, not strong and coercive threats, pleas, or guilt-trips as was Troilus's wont.

Yet another complication arises when Isonde and Tristrem inadvertently drink Mark's wedding day love potion.<sup>62</sup> Troilus and Criseyde, of course, had no such love aid. Its powerful effect inextricably binds the two: Isoude's "love might no man tuin [turn] / Til her ending day . . . And thereof were thai fain [happy] . . . Al blithe was the knight" (1671–72, 1678, 1689). Their consummation continues "in boure night and day" (1688), for "Thai loved with al her might" (1693). The couple are mutually involved, without deception or persuasion of each other, as occurred between Troilus and Criseyde. But another, perhaps more crucial situation, faces Tristrem and Isonde: the Lady must marry King Mark. After the wedding,

<sup>62</sup> One might speculate that the maid Brengwain might have noted Isonde and Tristrem's budding affection, and served them the potion intentionally, but none of the texts suggests her motive.

Isonde's passive resistance to Mark is evident in her secretly replacing her body with her maid Brengwain's, and in her continuing deception. Alan Lupack summarizes, saying "She asks for the drink from Ireland to make it seem to him that they have shared the love potion, but she lets the cup fall because she does not want to share it with Mark and she no longer needs it to strengthen her love of Tristrem, since their love is already sealed by the earlier drinking of the potion."<sup>63</sup> Her deception is explained by their passion: "No might no clerk it rede, / The love bituen hem to" (1726–27). Its excess is evident in her plot to have Brengwain slain, recanting only when recalling that the maid supplied her smock, and by extension, herself, when Isonde's was besmirched on her wedding night. Regardless of her marriage, "Tristrem, without lesing, / Played with the Quen" (1807–08), for his love is too strong to be denied. After Mark promises a well-loved harper anything he desires, that minstrel demands his Queen Isonde. Amazingly, Mark concedes to his demand, raising the indignation of the offended, perhaps jealous Tristrem, who is genuinely concerned for her welfare:

Tho was Tristrem in ten [in a rage]  
and chidde with the King: [scolded]  
"Gifstow glewmen thi queen? [Do you give minstrels]  
Hostow no nother thing?" (1849–52)

Running to the ship where she is kidnapped, he sings his genuine emotions to himself:

Swiche song he gan to sing  
That hi was swithe wo.  
Hir hert brast neighe ato. (1860–62).

The difference between the self-centered Troilus seeking his own satisfaction and the Ysonde-centered Tristrem seeking hers is startling. Tristrem's successful wooing continues, for she remains deeply in love with him. The excessive sorrow she has felt at separating from him, which Criseyde never felt, will be repaired, she says,

"Within a stounde of the day [brief time]  
Y schal be hole and sounde.  
  
Ich here a menstral; to say,  
Of Tristrem he hath a soun." (1871–74)

At first the earl angrily retorts: curse Tristrem if this musician's song made you think of him and hence are sad; but he retracts his curse, claiming the harper shall go with them aboard the ship, "Fo thou lovest his gle"(1881). Truly Isonde is

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<sup>63</sup> Lupack, *Lancelot of the Laik and Sir Tristrem*, 269, note to ll. 1720 ff.

lovingly comforted by Tristrem's harp-playing as she frolicks by the shore, as Criseyde is comforted by Troilus's letters. Just as Tristrem pretends to be Isonde's minstrel, not her lover, to deceive Mark, initially Troilus pretends to be Criseyde's friend, not her lover, to deceive Criseyde. The deception deepens, however, when Tristrem and Isonde escape into the forest for a week where "Hir blis was ful brade, / And joieful was that may" (1920–21). No doubt the intensity of their passion increases with the degree of rebellious violation they perpetrate. Saunders observes yet another connection between *Troilus* and *Tristrem* in pointing out: "A more allusive instance of intertextuality occurs when Criseyde, having looked down from her window to see Troilus riding past, murmurs, 'Who yaf me drinke?'" (II.651), thus recalling the magic potion of the Tristan story."<sup>64</sup>

After returning to court, the knight Meriadoc notices that the pair spent the night together, and instructs Mark to catch them: ask Isonde who she would like as protector while he goes on Jerusalem's pilgrimage. The wily and loyal Bringwain, recognizing the trap, advises Isonde to ask to go along, but send Tristrem away lest he kill her if he control her. She suggests Isonde declare that she "lovedest him never a day / Bot for his emes love" (2001–01). In fact, the Lady pretends she would request Mark "sle Tristrem the knight / Yif love of the no ware" [it weren't for her love of him] (2009–10) to squelch rumors. But the skeptical Meriadoc advises Mark to separate the two and watch. While Isonde would slay herself, Tristrem becomes ill at the separation—both evidence of love-longing. The desperate Tristrem resorts to carving runes to set up an assignation, and sends them down the stream. The spying dwarf treacherously pretends to carry Isonde's request to meet, but Tristrem wisely feigns loyalty to Mark. All these machinations are established not to deceive each other but Mark, who stands between their love. By contrast, Pandarus and Troilus's homosocial machinations are against Criseyde, whose reservations stand in the way of Troilus's lust.

With little evidence, the dwarf tells Mark, "Bi this robe, Y wate [know] / That michel he loveth the Quene . . . Y wot withouten wene / he cometh to hir tonight" (2093–94, 2100–02). As Mark sits in a tree that night, the two act for his benefit—accuse each other of infidelity and madness—both recognizing the fiction. As Tristrem threatens to go to Wales, Isonde swears she has been with no man but he who took her maidenhead—technically correct, since he was Tristrem. Their successful play-acting leads Mark to conclude "Ungiltles er ye / in swiche a sclaunder brought" (2144–45). Now the lovers can remain in close proximity, as they desire.

Now hath Ysonde her wille:  
Tristrem constable is heighe.  
Thre yere he playd stille

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<sup>64</sup> Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, 293, n. 7.



With Ysonde bright so beighe. [as a jewel]  
 Her love might no man felle, [destroy]  
 So were thai bothe sleighe. [clever] (2168–73)

While Troilus sought no method to remain with his beloved, used no ploy to keep Criseyde in Troy, Tristrem has successfully engineered their continued unity. After Meriadoc's instigative blood-letting and the couple are separated, Tristrem's love motivates him to leap thirty feet to be with his beloved.<sup>65</sup> Troilus was never that assertive. But the feat opens his wound and reveals his guilt, forcing him to leave. Isonde doesn't get off so easily, for Mark requires her to undergo the Ordeal of Iron. Of course, the devoted Tristrem returns in disguise to save his love, which Troilus never attempted. Tristrem's carrying the nearly naked Queen to the ship allows her to swear truly that no man but he and the King have been near her body. Tristrem loves his beloved enough to provide her that clever rationalization, despite risk to himself. The same cannot be said for Troilus.

Back in Wales, Tristrem wins the country in combat with the giant Urgan, and with it, the multicolored dog Peticrewe; the first he gives to Princess Blancheflour, and the second to Queen Ysonde. This gift brings him back to England, with many lands from Mark. "Who was blithe in halle / Bot Ysonde the Quene?" (2436–37). But now even Mark sees their visible lovemaking. The punishment of exile for both is meant as vengeance, but their ability to remain together diminishes it. The pair have their love. Now in the forest without abode, "Ysonde of joie hath her fille / And Tristrem without wene" (2460–61) — never have they been so happy before. Living in a cave with Peticrewe and hunting dogs, eating captured game and grass, drinking well-water, they are nonetheless joyfully in love. No adversity could separate or depress them. On the other hand, when Criseyde is exiled to Troy, Troilus merely moans, complains, and fails to accompany her. His love is not sustaining, or nourishing to either of them. In comparison, for nearly a year, Tristrem and Isonde maintain this isolated forest life of love.

One day, Tristrem lays his sword beside Isonde and lies down after his hunt. Coincidentally, Mark's men come by, and see between them "A drawen swerd wel bright" (2530). Again, the King cannot convince himself of their innocence, that "'Thai no hede nought of swiche [sexual] play, / Ywis.' / the knightes seyden 'Ay, For trewe love I is'" (2549–52). Such discovery leads Mark to invite the couple back to civilization. But the love between the two is too great to be stopped. Although they walk cautiously to their play, the dwarf spies them, and Mark finds them in the act. Even in danger, when Tristrem leaves to hide from Mark's vengeance, he cannot tear himself from her, but returns that night to make love to Ysonde.

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<sup>65</sup> Lupack, comments that "Tristrem's leap of thirty feet is quite an accomplishment. The current record for the long jump, held by Carl Lewis, is twenty-eight feet, ten and a quarter inches." See 271, note to l. 2199.

This sexually charged romance playing up the erotic elements differs from the earlier tradition, such as the German versions, and both accounts for and stimulates their liaison. On the other hand, when Troilus becomes distraught, never does he venture to Troy to seek out his beloved, but self-pityingly cries in his room. When Tristrem must leave for good, he does so with such pain as a man who would be slain. Exploring Spain, he expends his nervous and sexual energy slaying three giants. Solving conflicts in Britain, he wins land from a Duke whose daughter is also named Isonde, and who seriously woos this great fighter. The narrator claims "Tristremes love was strong / On swete Isonde the Quene" (2652–53), and when he sings about her, the new Isonde of the White Hands mistakenly reads the song as for her. No doubt the confused Tristrem is conflating the two, holding ambivalent feelings for both at this time. His ambivalent response, to marry the second Isonde, but not consummate the marriage, suggests such dichotomous feelings. Nevertheless,

Tristrem biheld that ring;  
 Tho was his hert ful wo.  
 "Ogain me swiche a thing  
 Dede never Ysonde so."

(2685–88)

Recognizing his infidelity, the man is miserable, for he knows Ysonde did not deserve his abandonment. When Criseyde leaves Troilus for Diomedes, she feels no such guilt pangs, never having felt as involved as Troilus; perhaps she was also resentful of his dominance and coercion in initiating and continuing their affair. Never did she feel as passionate as Tristrem did toward Ysonde who selflessly loved Tristrem more than Troilus selflessly loved Criseyde. Nor was she connected for as long a period as Tristrem, or faced and overcame as many hardships for their love. Tristrem, however, experiences flashbacks of his prior life, and nostalgically mourns "Swete Isonde."

Soon Tristrem finds a reason to leave his wife-in-name-only when she jokingly reveals her chaste state to her brother. Returning to his former home, Tristrem spies his Queen Isonde with joy, hears her voice speaking to Brengwain, and sends her their identifying love-token. The beloved Queen's first response is to admit her love-longing, waiting there for her lover; secondly, she immediately becomes ill, until she spies Tristrem's face. Then "Tuo night ther thai lye / In that forest fair" (3136–37) to reconnect their love. One cannot imagine Troilus sleeping outdoors in Greece to be with Criseyde. But again the Queen is kidnapped, now by Sir Canados, requiring Tristrem to assume another disguise, that of a leper bearing cup and clapper for fifteen days. Troilus was not at all willing to undergo any such harsh conditions for his love. During this forced separation before the Queen is rescued, she writhes about in dismay, nearly going insane, and Tristrem lies in sorrow—both agonizingly missing the other. However, Brengwain reveals Isonde's captivity to Mark, urging him to separate Canados from Isonde.

Successfully freed by Mark, Isonde again seeks out Tristrem for the night. In the aggregate, this evidence of their mutual desire and concern for each other suggests a higher order of love than that Troilus experienced, his being sexually and emotionally self-centered, controlling, and limited in the extreme.

Although the Middle English text of *Sir Tristrem* (the only extant text being in the Auchinlech Manuscript) breaks off here, Sir Walter Scott has added a conclusion based on the legend found in other versions.<sup>66</sup> Scott's ending posits Tristrem calling Queen Isonde from England to cure his recurring old wound. Her willingness to come and dismay at discovering his malady evidence her devotion and unconditional love for him under all circumstances. Now, she takes on the disguise of a man, weeping bitter tears on the ship to her lover. If she arrives, white sails are to be flown, but if not, black ones; the jealous wife Isonde, however, falsely reports black sails, causing Tristram's heart to break in two for sorrow. Learning the fate of her lover, Queen Isonde runs to the Castle gate and into his chamber, but finding him cold as a stone, she lies her body upon his to join him in death. This ultimate gesture of love and unity is greater than either Troilus or Criseyde could have extracted. In fact, Walter Scott maintains "Swiche lovers als thei / Neve schal be moe" (3508–09). Indeed, he is right. This hypothetical ending can remain nothing but an intuition of the poet's intent; but it nonetheless remains true to the tone, spirit, and legend behind the tale.

Again, Mieszkowski offers the critical framework by which to categorize and interpret these three dissimilar romances which treat love and sexuality in radically disparate fashions:

In the romances, being capable of extraordinarily intense, idealizing love is the sign of a great soul. Men and women risk their lives and fortunes to love because nothing else conceivably equals its worth. Probably in the late twelfth century these notions amused court ladies and scandalized their husbands, Larry Benson hypothesizes, but in the late fourteenth century, love as a "source of chivalric virtue" was such a commonplace idea that it appeared in nonfiction conduct handbooks as well as in fiction. In the tradition of going between for sexual conquest, on the other hand, love is lust, usually predatory lust, and its goal is physical possession of the other person rather than the winning of love.<sup>67</sup>

Sexual love in medieval romance, then, is positive, virtuous, and ennobling if it generously and altruistically places the beloved first, but negative, unchivalrous and corrupting if predatory, manipulative, and focused on lustful possession of the beloved.

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<sup>66</sup> *Sir Tristrem; A Metrical Romance of the Thirteenth Cenury; by Thomas of Erceldoune, Called the Rhymer*, ed. Sir Walter Scott. 3rd ed. (1804; Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co, 1811).

<sup>67</sup> Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, 137.

Other versions of the *Tristan* legend may be a useful indication of true love which cares altruistically and profoundly for the beloved rather than pursuing selfish love which is merely desirous and self-indulgent. Crane indicates that Thomas of Britain:

attributes a double motive to Tristan's act of marriage: his sexual need and his jealous doubt that Queen Isolt still loves him. The sexual pressure Tristan feels is reflected in the great variety of terms he applies to satisfaction . . . but its source is his very love for Isolt as she is weakly mirrored in Isolt of Brittany, who shares her name and her beauty. These reflected traits and the maiden's desire for Tristan, echoing the queen's love, intensify unbearably Tristan's love-longing . . . and lead him to attempt to reduce his pain by marrying Queen Isolt's shadow. Thus his sexual motive for marrying is a function of his love for queen Isolt; and only the marriage itself is "encontre amour", a kind of vengeance on his own love-suffering. . . . Sexual passion is necessary to love.<sup>68</sup>

Crane is right in focusing on the power of erotic love as a motive and rationale for action in these source tales, as they do in *Sir Tristrem*. As idealized as *Troilus and Criseyde* has been painted, the love between the principle characters is somewhat less than perfect. Had they the kind of love and erotic drive shared by Tristrem and Ysonde, both would have been motivated to reunite, find a way, eliminate their distance. Furthermore, free choice and acceptance of a sexual relationship is absolutely required and violations of free choice by subtle coercions such as those in *Troilus and Criseyde* inevitably weaken love and desire. Some critics find Chaucer offers little condemnation of Troilus's coercion of Criseyde, and perhaps read his victories gleefully. This would make the audience one with the coercive seducer, a co-conspirator in his success, oblivious to Criseyde's reluctance and reservations. The text can be interpreted as criticizing Troilus's lack of sensitivity toward his beloved, however.

Crane also discusses the broader tradition of Tristan's love, its definition, and its constituents, noting that Tristan's "marriage becomes not a forgetful abandonment of love, but a result of love's overwhelming power. In order to accomplish, this both sexual need and jealous doubt must be accepted as features of *fin' amor*, and Thomas accepts them wholeheartedly. This incorporation of unattractive emotions into ideal love is consistent with other aspects of Thomas's treatment of the legend."<sup>69</sup> The genre is riddled with such ambiguity. For example, heterosexual erotic love can be seen as both an inspiration for chivalry and a hindrance to its success: the very act of placing the feminine in contention between two masculines simultaneously creates both rivalry between the two and opportunity for each to defend her from the rival. What appears to be chivalric protection has a darker side, in its capturing of the female between rival males to achieve that protection.

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<sup>68</sup> Crane, *Insular Romance*, 150–51.

<sup>69</sup> Crane, *Insular Romance*, 151.

Within medieval romance, sexuality, brutality, and even coercion play a pre-eminent role in narrative action, as noted throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, *Athelston*, and *Sir Tristrem*.

Although the way moderns construct the Middle Ages is heavily influenced by our own historic context, sexual attitudes, views of free choice, and even salvation found in variously styled "romances" clearly operate in an ambiguous, multilateral fashion that sometimes undercut prior chivalric idealization of the genre. While sexual love can be ennobling and chivalric when it is altruistic, as evidenced by *Sir Tristrem*, it can also be merely lustful, discourteous, and degrading to the beloved when it is self-seeking, coercive, and manipulative as in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and even downright villainous and murderous as in *Athelstan*. Mieszkowski rightly concludes, "While in the idealized stories love is the entryway into a realm of idyllic experience and finally the passport to ecstasy, in the stories of love and sexual conquest, love does not ennoble anyone. Ordinarily it is just sex, and more often than not, it turns out to be degrading and expensive sex."<sup>70</sup> That the romance genre encompasses such a wide spectrum of sexual manifestations attests to the variety of human experiences it so aptly represent.

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<sup>70</sup> Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-Betweens*, 3.

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## Caught in the Act: Malory's "Sir Gareth" and the Construction of Sexual Performance

Sir Thomas Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth" in the *Works* presents readers with one of the most unusual knightly tales in the collection.<sup>1</sup> Malory is typically seen as a compiler and synthesizer of numerous and disparate strains of Arthurian materials. Scholars have typically noted the pastiche nature of his "Tale of Sir Gareth." Given its status in the Malorian canon, the "Tale of Sir Gareth" is unique in two areas: its apparent lack of absolutely clear sources from the French, Welsh, or English traditions, and its construction of Gareth as one model for Arthurian masculinity, which results from Malory's greater freedom in the development of the story.<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Wheeler has commented on Malory's construction of the masculinity of Arthur as an amalgamation of masculine and feminine qualities, and Robert Merrill has discussed Gareth's attempts to repress feminine traits in his developing sense of manhood. D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. has noted the rhetorical pattern of the folk fairy tale, and in particular, Malory's use of those elements in the shaping and presentation of his chief character, Gareth.<sup>3</sup> Without question, the linguistic representation of masculinity and sexuality are circumscribed by a language of control.

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. Eugene Vinaver, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). All textual references to Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth" are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> See the following as representative studies of sources: Thomas L. Wright, "On the Genesis of Malory's Gareth," *Speculum* 57 (1982): 569-82; Larry D. Benson, *Malory's Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 92-108; P. J. C. Field, "The Sources of Malory's 'Tale of Sir Gareth,'" *Aspects of Malory*, ed. Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1981), 57-70; Daniel F. Pigg, "Language as Weapon: The Poetics of Plot in Malory's 'Tale of Sir Gareth,'" *Quondam et Futurus* 2, 1 (1992): 16-27.

<sup>3</sup> Bonnie Wheeler, "The Masculinity of King Arthur: From Gildas to the Nuclear Age," *Quondam et Futurus* 2, 4 (1992): 1-26; Robert Merrill, *Sir Thomas Malory and the Cultural Crisis of the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987); D. Thomas Hanks, Jr., "The Rhetoric of the Folk Fairy Tale in Sir Thomas Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth*," *Arthuriana* 13, 3 (2003): 52-67.

Violence and masculine development in the knightly tradition are clearly connected, and for Gareth these elements take on a new significance. As Albrecht Classen has noted, "erotic love, one of the loftiest emotions and ideals, has often been intimately connected with violence, probably because it leads too easily to possessiveness and is marred by dangerous elements of self-centeredness."<sup>4</sup> While his study does not reference Malory's representation of Gareth, his observation is very germane to the author's development of Gareth and his trials related to identity. Corrine Saunders has noted that elements of magic in the Malorian canon are widespread, and that "magic is intrinsically bound up with ideas of violence."<sup>5</sup> Gareth's challenge related to his sexuality combines both elements of violence in magic and violence in mutually reinforcing ways.

What seems clear from all of these studies is that the study of Sir Gareth would benefit from a study of gender theory in an historical context. In his recent monograph entitled *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, James A. Schultz warns readers against interpreting medieval desire along the lines of the modern and particularly Lacanian desire, but instead more along the conflicting lines of theological, medical and courtly traditions which are contradictory in their historical moment.<sup>6</sup> Being "caught in the act" means many different things in the "Tale of Sir Gareth," but all meanings relate to an historical understanding of the conflicting discourses of masculinity, sexual performance, knighthood, marriage, family honor, and property rights. Being "caught in the act" as this essay will demonstrate places Gareth at the very center of conflict with theological, medical, and knightly discourses. To understand his presentation, we must sort through these various discursive bundles as they help us to understand this unique Malorian figure. It is very possible that Gareth is praised and condemned and a success and a failure all at the same time.

Given that the tale represents a somewhat more creative approach to the treatment of Arthurian materials, it may be said to present more of the author's personal views of knightly activity. Such expressions of chivalry and its obligations seem more in accord with the kinds of changes that Ruth Karras sees in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Knighthood meant "social status," not

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<sup>4</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Introduction: Violence in the Shadows of the Court," *Violence in Medieval Courtly Society: A Casebook* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 1–36.

<sup>5</sup> Corinne Saunders, "Violent Magic in Middle English Romance," *Violence in Medieval Courtly Society: A Casebook* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 225–40.

<sup>6</sup> James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 63–77. Most of the texts that he examines in his study are from Middle High German, but the principles remain the same for Middle English texts. For a counter position, see Erin Felicia Labbie, *Lacan's Medievalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

just a "military function" in a feudal setting.<sup>7</sup> There was also a growing body of conduct literature in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including the translations of Geoffroi de Charny's *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry* and Raymon Lull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, also published in 1485 by Caxton, that helped to shape a new chivalry.<sup>8</sup> These developments are significant in the way that they establish a prism through which we can understand Malory's "Tale of Sir Gareth" and the challenges of sexuality to the world of knights, for they prescribe specific behaviors relating to sexual activity for the knight. Gareth is far more than just another married knight, and he does not, as Maureen Fries suggests, portend that marriage is a "strain[ed] knightly development"<sup>9</sup> and hence the reason why marriage seems to receive such little attention in Malory's *Works*. Instead Gareth represents some of the challenges to the boundaries of performativity and the limitations of discourse to govern behavior.

## I

There is no question that the appearance of scholarship on the history of women in medieval society and their representation in medieval texts has forever changed our understanding of the material and ideological status of women in Western Europe. It might seem strange on the surface that this same scholarly approach has in the two decades turned to the study of men both in terms of sexuality and gender, but as Claire Lees notes the presentation of women is inextricably bound up with the men and that there are "many different male experiences that still need to be recovered" today.<sup>10</sup> Without question much medieval scholarship has focused on male writers and male characters, yet for the most part, attention was not paid to their gender and sexuality in any directly conscious way; it was only

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formation of Masculinity in the Late Medieval Europe*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffroi de Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, trans. Elisabeth Kenney. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Raymon Lull, *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, ed. Alfred T. P. Byles. Early English Text Society, 168 (London: Oxford University Press, 1926). For a discussion of the role of these texts in conduct, see *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and L. A. Clark. Medieval Cultures, 29 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Maureen Fries, "How Many Roads to Camelot? The Married Knight in Malory's *Mort D'Arthur*," *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend. Essays in Honor of Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. Martin B. Shichtman and James B. Carley. SUNY Series in Mediaeval Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 196–207; here 204.

<sup>10</sup> Claire Lees, "Introduction," *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Claire A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara. Medieval Cultures, 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), xvi.



assumed as a way of approaching other points connected with male power in the family, political alliances, feudal relationships, and religious vocations. Work by such scholars as Carol J. Clover, Kathleen Biddick, Nancy F. Partner, Claire Lees, Vern L. Bullough, and Jeffrey Cohen has demonstrated the need to reexamine the presentation of masculinity in medieval texts, both as an essence and as a social construct.<sup>11</sup> Their research has produced a plethora of studies that have called into question some of our most deep-seated beliefs about medieval gender and sexuality. Part of the challenge of understanding Gareth lies in the conflicting discourses that were a part of medieval masculinity and the challenges of medieval knighthood. Gareth is at the heart of the conflict, and his responses to it are part of his own working out his individual problem.

Before we examine the tale itself, it is important to establish a basic knowledge of medieval masculinity and knightly sexuality standards, especially those related to purity.

These are the standards that regard the married or unmarried status of the knight, and his obligations to behaviors based on that status.

## II

One of the most significant issues in the representation of masculinity is the ideological understanding of the human body. In a groundbreaking study, Thomas Laqueur argued that up to the eighteenth century a single-sex model was dominant in western society. Drawing on the works of Galen and Aristotle, he demonstrates that the perfect image of that body was the male body; women were perceived as inferior males.<sup>12</sup> The implications of these observations are highly important to the distinctions between sex and gender, which has become a commonplace in gender studies.<sup>13</sup> Stephen Garton observes that "the one sex body meant that bodies were fluid in their presentation, while gender was a rigid

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<sup>11</sup> Carol J. Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Modern Europe," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 363–87; Kathleen Biddick, "Gender, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 389–418; Nancy F. Partner, "No Gender, No Sex," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 419–43; Claire Lees, "Introduction," xv–xxv; Vern L. Bullough, "On Being Male in the Middle Ages," *Medieval Masculinities*, 31–45; Jeffrey Cohen, "Medieval Masculinities," *Interscripta* discussion for October–November 1993. Finished article in 1994 available through the Labyrinth Project online at: [www8.georgetown.edu/departments/medieval/labyrinth/e-center/interscripta/mm.html](http://www8.georgetown.edu/departments/medieval/labyrinth/e-center/interscripta/mm.html) (last accessed on March 31, 2008)

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 30–31. See also the contribution to this volume by Allison P. Coudert.

<sup>13</sup> Elaine Showalter, "Introduction: The Rise of Feminism," *Speaking of Gender*, ed. Elaine Showalter (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) 1–13.

system which prescribed distinct spheres of gendered behavior."<sup>14</sup> Carol Clover also extends Laqueur's observations to Old Norse literature to show that a dividing line exists in society as a result of this ideological model. The perfect form was the virile male; thus women, children (even boys before adulthood), eunuchs, and impotent males occupied a space of other in that model.<sup>15</sup> Vern L. Bullough states the issue directly: "Though what constitutes manhood has varying definitions according to a society or culture or time period, the most simplistic way of defining it is as a triad: impregnating women, protecting dependents, and seeming to provide to one's family."<sup>16</sup> On the biological level, masculinity was connected with rational thought and action in distinction to the feminine. The body itself was the site of power. For males, that power resided in the thighs which "represented strength, musculature, power and activity."<sup>17</sup> As Hildegard of Bingen and many medical authorities noted, semen was a product of the blood, even a more refined and pure essence of it. The production of semen was a manifestation of male strength and prowess.<sup>18</sup> Given these defining qualities, masculinity became performative, in many cases, similar to the medieval knight's wielding of arms. To fail in the performance would render a male subject to shame—a shame that is actually dramatized when Gareth fights several knights who are identified by various colors (black, green, indigo, red, brown, etc.) before his marriage with Lyonesse. Gareth's defeat of them makes him worthy of marrying Lyonesse; the shame relates to the feelings that several of the knights experience.

Gareth's presentation throughout the tale partakes more of a developing constructionist view within an historical and cultural frame, yet it does not dismiss the implications of essentialism. If the model of biology equals destiny rather than "men are made, not born"<sup>19</sup> was a standard belief in the late Middle Ages, Malory presents us with a knight who desires to establish a name for himself through performance—an aspect of nobility that Karras has shown was growing in England in the late Middle Ages both in literature and life, but had been the

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Garton, *Histories of Sexuality: Antiquity to Sexual Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Clover, "Regardless of Sex," 363–73.

<sup>16</sup> Bullough, "On Being Male in the Middle Ages," 34.

<sup>17</sup> Joyce E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (Garland Reference Library of the Humanities [New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996], 81–102; here 85.

<sup>18</sup> Joan Cadden, *Meaning of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 78. See also Murat Aydemir, *Images of Bliss: Ejaculation, Masculinity, Meaning* (2004; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 3–30, traces ideas about semen to Aristotle.

<sup>19</sup> Anne Fausto-Sterling, "How to Build a Man," *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 127–34; here 128.

dominant model already much earlier in continental medieval societies.<sup>20</sup> Malory's knight is thus "making himself." Gareth must demonstrate himself in two ways: his ability to defeat other knights and his ability to serve a lady.

### III

When Gareth first appears at Arthur's court, the narrator's description and his immediate reception are constructed in terms that are reminiscent of the ideological power latent in body as was described earlier. . The narrator notes:

Ryght so com into the halle two men well besayne and rychely, and uppon their sholdyrs there lened the goodlyest yonge man and the fayreste that ever they all sawe. And he was large and longe and brode in the shuldyrs, well-vysaged, and the largyete and the fayreste handis that ever may sye. (177)

[In this way two men came into the hall well seeming and rich, and upon their shoulders leaned the best-looking young man and the fairest that they ever saw. He was large, tall, and broad in the shoulders, well-visaged, and he had the largest, fairest hands that anyone had ever seen.]

It seems without question that a symbolic enactment is being rendered with Gareth's position of weakness and youth being visualized.<sup>21</sup> The narrator's description of his shoulders, however, stresses his masculine body, and his appearance bespeaks his nobility, even if he desires to hide that from identification. That Gareth matures after being in Arthur's court for one year as a kitchen servant is a product of the tale's connection to the folkloric tradition of withheld identity—both gendered and familial—and a dismissal of verisimilitude or to the more obvious performative qualities of gender and sexual development. The well-proportioned body at the outset is certainly indicative that he possesses the outward form of developing male power—even in a sublimated sexual way—and that likely forecasts his incorporation into knightly masculinity. Raymon Lull notes in the *Book of the Order of Chivalry* that "A man lame / or ouer grete or fatte / or that hath any other euyl disposycion in his body" cannot become a knight."<sup>22</sup> (A man who is lame, overly large or fat or has any other evil disposition in his body" cannot become a knight.) That all except Sir Kay respond positively to Gareth reflects their perceptions of him through culturally given markers of masculinity, which he is assuming.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 20–66.

<sup>21</sup> Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* (The Hague: Brill, 1987), 68.

<sup>22</sup> Lull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, 63.

<sup>23</sup> Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, 21–28.

The attention to his hands sets up the identity quest in the text. What others perceive as an emblem of his masculine qualities, Kay understands in a very different way. As Felicity Riddy notes, the discussions of masculine development and class converge in Kay's nickname for Gareth "Beaumains."<sup>24</sup> It is a rebuke for Gareth because Kay does not see him as nobly born. Some scholars have suggested the tag "fair hands" could be prophetic of his future abilities at wielding weapons and hence a traditional association with Arthurian manhood. Still others have suggested the term may be an insult to his sense of gendered identity: "effeminacy."<sup>25</sup> Sir Kay certainly understands the term as an indication of indolence and lack of hard labor associated with the courtly feminine. In the fabliau genre of Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*, we have only to think of "hende" Nicholas to see that "being good with hands" can also have a sexual meaning. Apparently, Gareth was good in that way too—of course, the narrative only hints at that and seeks to control the potential *fabliau* prospects! While it is impossible to be absolutely certain, it would seem all of these may be correct. Since his strength is in question and since Lynet taunts him about his strength, it would seem that the designation of Beaumains should be understood as a probing of both sexual and gendered identities. This same motif can be found in Wirnt von Grafenberg's *Wigalois* and its French source, *Bel Inconnu*.<sup>26</sup> For the reader, the question of his strength is answered in his first encounter with Lancelot, after which Lancelot knights him. Lancelot stops the fight, recognizing that Gareth possesses equal or superior strength. It is intriguing to note that Gareth chooses the knight whose prowess of arms and adulterous devotion to Guinevere is well known and that a knight passed his qualities to the one he knights in a kind of spiritual way. As the narrative develops with his progressive overcoming of five knights, the questionable naming of Beaumains takes on a different meaning. Certainly it references Sir Kay's scornful employment of the name, but it is revalued as a name reclaimed and assigned new valence. The narrator almost always uses the designation Beaumains in the sense of military and manly prowess in arms to vindicate Gareth's knightly masculinity.

Gareth accepts the challenge of Lynet to free her sister from the Red Knight of the Red Lands, one of the most formidable foes to Camelot. If, as Schultz has noted, the eyes or gaze is important to courtly love, all eyes are focused on Gareth.<sup>27</sup> He is probably unique in terms of the number of battles he undertakes

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<sup>24</sup> Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, 66–68, 152.

<sup>25</sup> Merrill, *Sir Thomas Malory and the Cultural Crisis of the Late Middle Ages*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> See the Seelbachs' epilogue to Wirnt von Grafenberg, *Wigalois*. Text der Ausgabe von J. M. N. Kapteyn übersetzt, erläutert und mit einem Nachwort versehen von Sabine Seelbach und Ulrich Seelbach (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005), 263–65.

<sup>27</sup> Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, 66–73.

in the presence of women, both with respect to their approving and disapproving gaze. A narrative with numerous doublets,<sup>28</sup> “The Tale of Sir Gareth” presents the sequences of fights with the Green Knight and the Red Knight, and in each case, establishes the ability of Gareth to subdue his opponent and to petition Lynet as the arbiter of whether the knight lives or dies. Gareth even notes after the fact that her verbal taunting during the fight sequences—where she embarrasses the other knight for not being able to defeat a kitchen knave—“pleased” (191) him. None of these encounters has particular sexual dimensions, but they are necessary to establish the honorable side of Gareth as a worthy knight. Gareth’s later sexual testing has a corollary to his knightly performance of arms. The coded language of abuse—kitchen knave—is vital to the performance of Arthurian manhood. This same element plays a great role in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Willehalm* (in the vein of a *chanson de geste*, ca. 1220). In Malory’s “Gareth,” Lynet has a vital role in constructing Gareth’s own image of himself.

According to Lull, “A knyght ought more to doubte the blame of the people and his dishonoure than he shold the perylle of dethe.”<sup>29</sup> (A knight should seek to avoid the blame of the people and his dishonor [more] than he should the peril of death.) Lynet has called into question the masculine abilities of various color knights and Gareth in both physical and ideological ways. To some degree, Gareth’s opponent here is just as much Lynet as the color knights. Deeply encoded into knighthood and gender differentiation was the following notion:

Of as much as a man hath more of wytte and of understanding / and is of more stronge nature than a woman / Of soo moche may he [be] better than a woman / for yf hewere not puyssaunt and dyfferent to be better than the woman / it shold ensiewe / that bounte and strengthe of nature were contrary to bounte of courage /and to god werkes / The nue al thus as a man by his nature is more apparaylled to haue noble courage / and to be better than the woman / In like wyse moche more enclyned to be vycious than a woman / For it were not thus / he shold not be worthy that he had gretter meryte to be good / more than the woman.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, Lull is a male writing for males, and we must keep that in mind in assessing the performative politics of the sexes he observes. If Gareth is to claim his place in the knightly construction of masculinity, he must then see Lynet’s continual taunting in light of Lull’s ideological pronouncements of gender difference that require him to surpass feminine qualities. Before he agrees to fight Sir Persaunte, the Blue knight, Gareth reveals to Lynet that

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<sup>28</sup> Catherine Batt, *Malory’s Morte Darthur: Remaking Arthurian Tradition*. New Middle Ages Series (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 96.

<sup>29</sup> Lull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Lull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, 17–18.

a knyght may lytyll do that may not suffir a jantyllwoman, for whatsomever ye sayde unto me I toke none hede to your wordys, for the more ye seyde the more ye angered me, and my wrethe I wraked uppon them that I had ado withall.

[191; "a knight may do little who may not suffer a gentlewoman, for whatever you said to me I took no notice to your words, but the more you said, the more you angered me, and my wrath and worked upon all of them with which I had to do"].

Gareth also says her words caused him to "shew and preve myselfe at the end what I was" (191; "show and prove myself in the end what I was"). Thus the coded language of abuse is vital to the performance of Arthurian manhood. Defeating both verbal and literal weapons is important to the gendered image that Gareth seeks to assume. Lynet's role here is significant. She helps him to perform an image of masculine power within a highly controlled and repetitive act. Language itself becomes the enemy through which and against which Gareth has to act. Assigning Lynet the role of opponent is not so much involved with the notion of repressing identity and desire in Gareth as it provides Malory with an opportunity to reimagine the role of the woman in helping her knight demonstrate who he is: a male. Learning to negotiate gendered and sexual space and identity is significant to the tale itself. Thus Malory shows here that women are indeed important in the social construction of gender and its manifestations in knightly culture.

Gareth's challenge to the Red Knight of the Red Lands who claims Lyonesse as his lady too shifts the level of performance, for now the challenge is one based on love and desire in courtly discourse. Gareth looks up at Lyonesse in the window before the battle, and the narrator notes that Lyonesse "made curtesy to hym downe to the earth, holdynge up bothe her hondys" (197; "made a courteous gesture to him down to the earth, holding up both her hands"). She emphasizes the role that hands play in ritualistic acts; it is an act of signaling an obligation on her part to him as deliverer. She gazes on her victor as the knights fight as "two borys" (198), yet this fight is unlike any of Gareth's others as the cultural valence has changed. This fight is for the "prize," not simply that of an opponent on the adventure. Gareth's win, however, does not make Lyonesse his lady. That must happen after his identity as a knight from a noble family is confirmed by multiple means, including the testimony of a kidnapped dwarf.

The meeting at the family castle of Lady Lyonesse, Lady Lynet, and Sir Gryngamour places the knightly concepts of temperance to the test, and in this case, Gareth almost fails. Sir Gryngamour and Lady Lynet approve of Lyonesse's interest in Gareth and his in Lyonesse, but they must stage a test of sorts to determine the nature of the Gareth/Lyonesse connection. The narrator notes that they met in secret and Gareth "kissed hir many tymes, and either made great joy of other, and there she promised him hir love sertainly to love hum and none other dayes of hir life" (205; "kissed her many times and both made joy of the other, and there she promised him hir love certainly to live him and none other [all

the] days of her life"). If the action had stopped her with their "trouthe-plight" (205), we would simply term this a betrothal ceremony. As Karen Cherewatuk has observed, their statement would have been regarded as the "legal status for marriage" and that the Church recognized such clandestine marriages, particularly if sexual activity had occurred before the actual ceremony.<sup>31</sup> Further, such marriages seem to have cut across social classes. In both Gareth's and Lyoness's eyes, they are married! While in large measure, Malory avoids overt moral positions in his work, it does seem that he supports the position of Lynet, who does not accept clandestine marriage, but instead favors public pronouncement of marriage.

Scholars have long debated the conflict between ecclesiastical and lay or popular understanding of human sexuality and institutional commitments outside the Church's initiation in the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, it is clear that betrothals and clandestine marriages occurred during that period. Ruth Karras, however, has observed a shift during the fifteenth century that may be a significant shaping fantasy behind the Gareth/Lyoness connection. Not only was counsel given to avoid clandestine marriages, but warnings were also given about overly anticipating the sexual act even in marriage.<sup>33</sup> Karras notes the writing of Peter Idley to his son (fifteenth century) and the dialogue *Dives and Pauper* as important texts that reflect a change of attitude. In *Dives and Pauper*, Karras observes that in the discussion of the sixth commandment, Dives, representative of the laity, is particularly rebuked by Pauper, representative of the clergy, for his attitude about illicit sexual activity outside marriage because it is a "mortal sin."<sup>34</sup> The societal tendency to "look the other way" with respect to male sexual activity was thus brought into check in this popular-based work.<sup>35</sup> Given Malory's free development of this story and the role into which he casts Lynet, it seems that some elements of the fifteenth-century shift merely from military man to person of economic and social status may be present in "The Tale of Sir Gareth."

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<sup>31</sup> Karen Cherewatuk, "Pledging Troth in Malory's 'Tale of Sir Gareth,'" *Journal of English and German Philology* 101, 1 (2002): 19–40; here 24.

<sup>32</sup> See also the contributions to this volume by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux and Sarah McDougall.

<sup>33</sup> Ruth Karras, "Two Models, Two Standards: Moral Teaching and Sexual Mores," *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace. *Medieval Cultures*, 9 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 123–26.

<sup>34</sup> Karras, "Two Models, Two Standards," 126–27.

<sup>35</sup> For a treatment on sexual mores in the Middle Ages, particularly on sexuality in the marital and non-marital states, see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Albrecht Classen, *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum frühen 17. Jahrhundert*. *Volksliedstudien*, 5 (Münster, New York, Munich, and Berlin: Waxmann, 2005).

## IV

The way in which Malory develops the sexual encounter between Gareth and Lyonesse seems indicative of the conflicting discourses found in other Malorian texts as well as those in cultural, medical, and ecclesiastical texts. This scene and its doublet require carefully reading.

To contextualize the developing scene, the narrator notes that Lyonesse and Gareth "brente both in hote love" and that they "accorded to abate their lustys secretly" (205; "burned both in lust" and "agreed to satisfy their lust secretly"). Beverly Kennedy sees this gesture as an attempt to reshape "the conflict between service to God and serve to lady,"<sup>36</sup> and therein lies the discursive challenge. Lull states that "lechery and justice are contrary, and that chivalry is ordained to maintain justice. The knight should be just and totally contrary to lechery."<sup>37</sup> Gareth is thus placed in a dilemma that calls into question all his previous actions. Medieval theology, as Schultz has observed, would have regarded this act as "concupiscence," an excess.<sup>38</sup> Medical texts and the performative discourse of medieval masculinity would have seen the desire as natural. So how do we as readers discern the correct reading? Lynet creates a magic knight to fight Gareth, but this again is unlike any other knightly challenge. Armed with a sword—both literally and symbolically—Gareth defeats the knight by decapitation, but only after Gareth is seriously wounded in his thigh. In Malory's *Works*, there is a similar wounding to the thigh in the grail quest when Percival wounds himself in the thigh after realizing that he has almost engaged in a sexual act, and there is also the reference to the Grail king with a wound in his thigh that can only be healed by Galahad. In one of Marie de France's *Lais*, Guigemar also has a wound in the thigh. Clearly, Gareth's wound is a sexual one—it is a sign of performance on two levels that holds in check competing discourses. From the narrative description, Gareth is at the beginning stages of sexual intimacy with Lyonesse. In medical terms, he has shown that he is not impotent through the early stages of sexual excitement—an important issue if he is to be married later.<sup>39</sup> In terms of knightly discourses and theological discourses, his wound is a punishment—a checking of desire. Gareth's wound is both a sign of his success and failure, and it alerts Lyonesse's family to the potential damage that Lyonesse may receive—a damage that Lyonesse seems all too willing to be an equal participant in. It is important to

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<sup>36</sup> Beverly Kennedy, *Knighthood in the Morte Darthur* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 146.

<sup>37</sup> Lull, *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, 42.

<sup>38</sup> Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, 70–71.

<sup>39</sup> Even if discovered after marriage, impotence was grounds for annulment of the marriage. See Jacqueline Murray, "Hiding Behind the Universal Male: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, 123–52; here 138–39.



note, however, that Gareth had earlier been offered the daughter of the Indigo knight as a sexual favor, but he refused to “deflower” her. Sometimes Gareth is able to control his sexual appetite.

The wounding in the thigh itself was significant in ancient folkloric tradition. Given that the tale itself is rooted in folkloric elements of name and identity, it would not seem unusual to examine the importance of the thigh in that context. In ancient practice, including the Hebrew tradition, the thigh was a traditional place to swear oaths.<sup>40</sup> Of course, the thigh was itself used euphemistically to refer to the genitals. Thus to swear allegiance on the thigh was to swear allegiance to the male and to his offspring. The thigh was thus a generative seat of reproductive, economic, and hereditary power. A violation of an oath sworn in this clearly intimate way was significant. While there are no swearings on the thigh in Gareth’s story, the thigh wound does have significance as a source of reproductive and hereditary power equivalent to a site governed by a swearing ritual. Lynet is particularly aware of this aspect with respect to family honor and the loss of honor that both he and Lyoness would suffer through a sexual encounter.

The sequence of events which transpire after Gareth defeats the enchanted knight is significant as it reveals more of the conflicting discourses of sexuality and honor. Lyoness cries out, and her brother Sir Gryngamour comes to the rescue too late to stop the action. Lyoness, quick to stop any possible misunderstanding of her agency in this spectacle, says “I can nat telle you, for hit was nat done by me nother by myne assente, for he is my lorde and I am his, and he muste be myne husbonde. Therefore, brother, I woll that ye wete I shame nat to be with hym nor to do hym all the plesure that I can” (206; “I cannot tell you because it was not done by me, neither by my consent, for he is my lord and I am his, and he must be my husband. Therefore, brother, I desire that you know I am not ashamed to be with him nor to do for him all the pleasure that I can”). Lyoness, here, is being somewhat ambiguous about her reasons for being in the hall. As Eve Salisbury observes, women were thought to “embody sexuality” and to have stronger sexual feelings and desires than men.<sup>41</sup> Lyoness’s remark, “to do hym all the pleasure that I can” (206), is clearly ambiguous and goes beyond the standards of courtly behavior.

Pleasure in a sexual sense, while certainly implied in the scene, would have been particularly problematic as an expression of sexual intercourse. Pleasure was condemned through ecclesiastical discourse even at the same time it was affirmed through medical texts.<sup>42</sup> Sir Gryngamour is himself, like Dives in the fifteenth-century poem, a believer in the “double standard” of male behavior. Clearly, since

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<sup>40</sup> Genesis 24:9.

<sup>41</sup> Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” 86.

<sup>42</sup> Cadden, *Meaning of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*, 84–88.

he is the nearest male relative to Lyonesse, he should be concerned in the same way that his sister Lynet is about Lyonesse's chastity. Instead, he remarks, "I am shamed that this noble knyght is thus dishonoured" (206; "I am shamed that this noble knight is thus dishonored").

Earlier that evening, Sir Gryngamour noticed the attraction between Lyonesse and Gareth and sought to establish a connection between the two. Now he and Lyonesse are in the position of caring for the wounded Gareth whose military prowess, sexual performance, and honorable behavior have been tested. What makes this win-loss moment so significant is that this is the first occasion when Gareth's contests have not been won successfully. How can Gareth both win and fail? Lynet provides the answer with her statement that "all that I have done I wolle avowe it, and all shall be for your worship and us all" (207; "all that I have done I will acknowledge it, and all shall be for your worship and for all of us"). Her standards of conduct here are higher than those of her brother or sister or Gareth.

At a second evening, the narrator presents readers with another doublet to the Lyonesse/Gareth encounter. In this case, Gareth defeats the magical knight, throws him out the window into a ditch. Gareth's wound reopens as a result of the conflict, and he falls to the floor as if dead from exhaustion. It is likely significant that the wound opens not as a result of another strike from the knight but from Gareth's own actions in movement. Lyonesse and Gareth "were so hoote in brennyng love that they made their covenantes at the tenth nyght aftir, that she sholde come to his bedde" (206; "were so hot in burning love that they made their covenant on the tenth night afterwards that she should come to his bed"). At the feast that evening, Gareth "was nyghe hole and waxed light and jocounde, and sange and daunced" (206; "was almost well and great light and jocular, and sang and danced"). In medical terms, Gareth was experiencing a period of pre-excitement, noted through these sublimated courtly behaviors.<sup>43</sup> Unlike the first wounding, this reopening of the wound is Gareth's body, in some way, reacting against Gareth's will. Challenging Lynet about her actions, Gareth gets a rebuke: "I have nothyng done but I wolle avow hit, and all that I have done shall be to your worship and to us all" (207; translated above). For Lynet, the reference point is the concept of honor, and that honor surfaces on two levels: Gareth's and Lyonesse's. The narrator shifts the scene to Arthur's court after telling us that the only person who can heal the wound is the one who caused the enchantment. The narrator's development of this scene seems to follow the thoughts and intentions of Lynet, so it is not unusual that the scene should close in this way.

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<sup>43</sup> Cadden, *Meaning of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, 78; Murray, "Hiding Behind the Universal Man," 134–37. For a discussion of sexual innuendo, see also the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph in this collection.

In both of the woundings, Gareth spills a considerable amount of blood on the bed or the floor. While this might remind readers of the blood that Lancelot leaves on Guinevere's bed at the castle of Melegaunce, it actually has more suggestive innuendo here. As a bodily fluid, according to medical texts, blood and semen are connected as was noted earlier; thus the wounding of Gareth and the bloodshed—a refracted symbolic experience given Gareth's reputation early in the tale as a military fighter—suggest Gareth's loss of control. In a very real sense, since the text does not mention any previous sexual experience on Gareth's part, this event is a symbolic loss of virginity—a loss equated by Lyonesse's family with the loss of honor. Bettina Bildhauer has noted that in practice male bodies were seen as bounded and complete while women's bodies were seen as "leaking." Female virgins were thought to have whole, complete bodies until they were "broken" through sexual intercourse, of course, with blood being the evidence of that change.<sup>44</sup> Further blood was seen as a corrupting possibility for all bodies.<sup>45</sup> For Gareth, this blood means that his own body has been violated by the intention of his own will; the wounding as far as Lynet is concerned seems an act of poetic justice. Gareth's wounding makes him no longer able to be Beaumains—the possessor of hand skills on several levels. His sexual prowess and military skill are thwarted by wounds that must heal before any further activity can occur.

The "Tale of Sir Gareth" ends with a triple marriage, Gareth to Lyonesse, Gaheris to Lynet, and Aggravayne to Lawrell. The private betrothal at the castle of Sir Gryngamour is affirmed by a public ceremony. Competing notions of marriage are also at work in this scene. One marriage is based on love and attraction; the other two are arranged directly by King Arthur. Ruth Karras observed that "women were one of the currencies in which a knight's success was measured."<sup>46</sup> If marriage by the fifteenth century was about social status and property rights, then Malory has brought the tale to a safe conclusion because he has united two well-to-do houses through the desire of Gareth and Lyonesse, but has equally held it in check through the actions of Lynet. Being caught in the act in "The Tale of Sir Gareth" is ultimately about the power of performance and about that performance to shape an external reality.

Malory has presented his readers with a complex, negotiated settlement of male sexuality in the context of his current day. As Charny contends, "It is those who conduct themselves most properly in the order of marriage who live joyfully and

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<sup>44</sup> Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*. Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 104–06.

<sup>45</sup> Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, 4–8.

<sup>46</sup> Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 51.

pleasantly."<sup>47</sup> From Geoffroi de Charny's perspective, Gareth has attained that end, with a great deal of help. If Gareth arrives at court leaning on the shoulders of two companions—clearly a symbolic gesture to indicate his need of aid, in a more significant way—Gareth has obtained the specific aid that brings into harmony the competing demands, hopes, dreams, anxieties, and fears of male sexuality with the help of Lady Lynet, even when he was unaware he needed her assistance. Louise M. Sylvester notes that sexual desire is always "publicly mediated even when they feel like inner discoveries."<sup>48</sup> Lynet serves just that purpose for Gareth and Lyonesse; she provides that context for understanding desire in a social setting. Gareth may amend some of the parameters of social institutions as he does with the service tasks of knights whom he has previously overcome as momentary servants at Camelot, but he must genuflect to social responsibility related to passion and desire.

Malory offers his readers a very significant text in his story of Sir Gareth. The well-apportioned body of Gareth, the splendor of Lyonesse, the abusive tongue of Lynet or Lady Savage, and the sexual encounters of Gareth and Lyonesse are all important acts to set the boundaries of knightly experience. Illicit and unchecked sexual relationships are dangerous in Malory's world. In a tale that seems closely tied to the material practices of Malory's period, sexual performance must be controlled, sublimated, and characterized as a key to material status in this world. There can be no casual sex in Camelot unless a knight wants to get caught in the act. And getting caught in the act has its consequences for ill and for good. The fifteenth century was itself a very challenging period for knighthood, allegiances, and social changes that were redefining how nobility was manifest.

Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth*, because it seems to be a highly original composition, provides the writer with the opportunity to present his late-medieval audience with an image of masculine sexuality at the nexus of desire and medical, theological, and chivalric discourse. Being "caught in the act" becomes a subject for a fictive moment of the text, but perhaps even more significant, it becomes an occasion for showing just how challenging the conflicts among masculinity, sexual performance, knighthood, marriage, family honor, and property rights had become.

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<sup>47</sup> Charny, *A Knight's Own Book of Chivalry*, 93.

<sup>48</sup> Louise M. Sylvester, *Medieval Romance and the Construction of Heterosexuality*. The New Middle Ages Series (New York and Houndmills, Basingstroke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 38.



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## Sexual Desire and Pornography: Literary Imagination in a Satirical Context. Gender Conflict, Sexual Identity, and Misogyny in “Das Nonnenturnier”<sup>1</sup>

Today, more than ever before, we can observe a surprising tendency to identify the medieval world with certain moral and ethical ideals and values that were actually rather typical of the nineteenth century—the formative period of Medieval Studies—whereas the evidence from the Middle Ages clearly indicates that the concepts of body and sexuality were certainly not the same as those that we subscribe to nowadays, unless we accept that we are actually returning to similar attitudes and values at the present moment.<sup>2</sup> In 1939 Norbert Elias had offered a seminal theory concerning cultural development specifically distinguishing the medieval world from modern culture, heavily relying on the common attitudes toward the body, sexuality, nudity, shame, and modesty.<sup>3</sup> He argued that the cultural process of civilization increasingly imposed new levels of shame and

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Marilyn Sandidge, Westfield State College, and Juanita Feros Ruys, University of Sydney, for a critical reading of this chapter. There is, admittedly, some deliberate overlap with the introduction to this volume, but I need the theoretical discussions regarding sexuality, shame, and the body for the development of my specific argument here as well.

<sup>2</sup> For the problematic nature of modern perceptions of medieval sexuality and the various practices concerning the body, see Albrecht Classen, *The Medieval Chastity Belt: A Myth-Making Process*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2007); John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France Around 1200*. The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994); *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex, and Marriage in the Medieval World*, ed. Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector. SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany: State University of New York, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*. 2 vols. (1939; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1981); here I consult the English translation by Edmund Jephcott: *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994). The issue at stake concerns our entire understanding of the Middle Ages in their social, ethical, moral, religious, medical, legal, and military framework; see, for example, Peter Dinzelbacher, *Europa im Hochmittelalter 1050–1250: Eine Kultur- und Mentalitätsgeschichte*. Kultur und Mentalität (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2003), 124–32, 159–61.

made the natural treatment of sexuality dramatically problematic with the rise of the modern world—neglecting, however, to define more concretely the meaning of ‘modern’ or to determine when the Middle Ages actually came to an end. The critical level when shame, particularly sexual shame, then self-discipline, public censure, and fear of bodily exposure—as a result of shame—became noticeable rose specifically in the sixteenth century. By the end of the Middle Ages, as he saw it—most likely, however, he was referring to the early, or even late, seventeenth century—parents increasingly excluded their children from the realm of sexuality and imposed ever harsher taboos on topics concerning the normal bodily functions. Elias emphasizes, for instance, “Even though subservient and socially dependent, boys lived very early in the same social sphere as adults. And adults did not impose upon themselves either in action or in words the same restraint with regard to the sexual life as later.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1988, Hans Peter Duerr, one of his sharpest critics, proposed, in radical contrast, that the experience of shame has always been a natural instinct in human culture and cannot be used as a criterion to define historical-cultural development.<sup>5</sup> General ideas of and approaches to sexuality, to be sure, cannot be ignored as some of the fundamental aspects specifically characterizing any society and revealing a host of basic conditions concerning the gender relationship, the attitude toward the body, the concept of the self, generational aspects, psychological identity, and the like. As Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin observe, “The body both produces knowledge and is shaped by it, both is determined by it and colludes with it. For within the social field, even though apparently obscured by it, fantasy and desire run their course. The body is after all *the* tool of desire, the

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<sup>4</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 144. For a thorough critique of Elias’s theses, see the contributions to *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*, ed. Rüdiger Schnell (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2004), especially Schnell’s own introduction, 6–9; see also Gerd Schwerhoff, “Zivilisationsprozeß und Geschichtswissenschaft: Norbert Elias’ Forschungsparadigma in historischer Sicht,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 266 (1998): 561–606. For additional perspectives, see *Norbert Elias and Human Interdependencies*, ed. Thomas Salumet (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001). For a specific focus on Elias in biographical terms, see Reinhard Blomert, “Der jüdische Intellektuelle und die Liebe zur höfischen Kultur: Über Norbert Elias,” *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für Europäisches Denken* 58 (2004): 395–406; Theo Stemmler, “Caxton’s *Morte Darthur*: A Confirmation of Norbert Elias’ *Prozess der Zivilisation*?,” *Of Remembrance the Key: Medieval Literature and Its Impact Through the Ages: Festschrift for Karl Heinz Göller on the Occasion of His 80th Birthday*, ed. Uwe Böker (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2004), 139–47.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Peter Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), 12: “es gehört zum Wesen des Menschen, sich seiner Nacktheit zu schämen, wie immer diese Nacktheit auch historisch definiert sein mag . . .”; Elias has also been attacked from many different perspectives, which might not come as a surprise considering the basic problem of all fundamental cultural theories; see the contributions to *Zivilisationsprozesse: Zu Erziehungsschriften in der Vormoderne*.

*tool of desire.*"<sup>6</sup> Despite many attempts by the public, especially the authorities in most societies, to subdue the general interest in sexuality, to establish control mechanisms, and to erect a screen of moral decency according to religious ideals, the erotic fantasy has always found ways to manifest itself and to become available for the public to enjoy the literary imagination in response to a basic human need. Despite many attempts to come to terms with the world of courtly love, the deep-seated dimension of desire and erotic imagination, intimately connected with the gaze onto the beloved object, continues to baffle us and forces us to rethink every time what medieval poets might have intended with their intriguing, but often highly ambiguous imagery and language.<sup>7</sup>

Sexuality, however, a seemingly much more mundane business or human activity, hence also addressed countless times in medieval and subsequent literature, also evades the interpreter's grip easily because it was discussed and continues to be explored from so many different perspectives because it powerfully reflects numerous social, political, religious, even military and economic aspects and conditions.<sup>8</sup> Sexuality could be investigated in light of religious confessions, canon law, medicine, philosophy, gender, marriage, procreation, identity, power, prostitution, group performance, ritual, and the arts.<sup>9</sup> Concomitantly, the discourse of sexuality in literary, historical texts, and in art-historical objects revealingly illustrates fundamental characteristics of any society, especially its basically ethical and moral framework with regard to the relationship of the genders. Most intriguing, however, has always been the light touch of eroticism, the catalyst of desire, conveyed through the gaze, as formulated in the literary discourse and in the visual arts, above all.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, the history of

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<sup>6</sup> Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, "Introduction," *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. ead. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 1–9; here 6.

<sup>7</sup> See the contributions to *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Craig A. Berry and Heather Richardson Hayton. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 294 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005); for the exploration of the history of eroticism, see C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin. Transl. Anthony Forster (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985); *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury. Garland Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Garland, 1991); Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York and London: Garland, 1996); see also James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> *L'Éroticisme au moyen âge*, ed. Bruno Roy. Collection "Exploration" / Études Médiévales (Quebec: Les Éditions de l'Aurore, 1977); see also Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of



sexuality underwent a considerable transformation process, and Elias undoubtedly hit upon a crucial component in the history of Western culture. Nevertheless, his thesis seems to address more the world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when shame indeed strongly entered the picture concerning public *mores*. By the same token, Duerr's counter-claims universalize and harmonize all cultural phenomena and do not appropriately take into account significant changes affecting all social classes and age groups at least since the early sixteenth century. The crucial problem rests in the attempt by sociologists, such as Elias, to develop historical structures, often ignoring basic historiographical research, and in the attempt by anthropologists, such as Duerr, to identify timeless and basic human characteristics, often ignoring the literary-historical context and social-economic criteria.<sup>11</sup>

My intention here is to introduce a stunningly graphic late-medieval German tale, "Das Nonnenturnier," where sexuality, castration, religious transgression, power struggle among the genders, and anti-clericalism intimately combine to achieve the desired effect, or to realize a specific strategy by the anonymous author. Desire and erotic imagination dominate the narrative, and yet it also reflects a profound sense of fear, insecurity, and lack of identity. As the title (in the modern edition) implies, the satirical intent, at least in the second part, is directed toward the monastic community, especially the female convent where sexual abstinence and chastity would seem to be of highest importance. However, this does not do full justice to the entire tale because it ignores the first part which addresses male problems with sexuality and their conflictual relationship with women. Moreover, there are various dimensions and topics built into the entire narrative connecting the secular with the clerical, the male world with the female, sexual concerns with gender conflicts, and contrasting the court with the convent, criticizing both spheres for fundamental transgressions, and also moral and ethical shortcomings. For his portrayal of the religious institution, the author obviously drew primarily from public opinion about the perceived conditions within a convent that allegedly failed utterly to meet the traditional, hence public and institutional, expectations regarding the chastity and morality of the women living

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Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> See Michael Hinz, *Der Zivilisationsprozess: Mythos oder Realität: Wissenschaftssoziologische Untersuchungen zur Elias-Duerr-Kontroverse*. Figurationen, 4 (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2002).

within a convent,<sup>12</sup> as also well illustrated by Boccaccio's first tale of the third day in his *Decameron*.<sup>13</sup>

The author demonstrates an utter disregard of traditional restraint over sexual matters and concentrates on them with a deftness that demands interpretative explanation and profoundly challenges some of Elias's central arguments regarding the progressive process of civilization which should have been in full swing by the fifteenth century. This work's unwavering focus on sexuality also brings into question the counter-argument by Hans Peter Duerr according to whom shame was a constant force in all human societies and should have prevented the publication of this and related narratives with an obviously pornographic slant.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps not quite surprisingly, considering the most graphic content, the narrative has survived in only one manuscript from ca. 1430 and 1435, in the Karlsruhe codex 408,<sup>15</sup> without revealing its author or specific audience for which it might have been composed. The brutality, or frivolity, with which sexual matters are addressed here finds hardly any parallels in medieval literature, perhaps with the exception of Old French *fabliaux*, individual late-medieval Shrovetide plays, and various Italian *facetiae*.<sup>16</sup> Some of the common elements might be, without

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of how life in women's convents was commonly depicted in late-medieval German verse narratives, see Birgit Beine, *Der Wolf in der Kutte: Geistliche in den Mären des deutschen Mittelalters*. Braunschweiger Beiträge zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 2 (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1999), 267–79. See also Helmut Brall, "Wahrlich, die Pfaffen sind schlimmer als die Teufel!": Zur Entstehung der deutschen Schwankdichtung im 13. Jahrhundert, "Euphorion" 94, 3 (2000): 319–34.

<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, transl. Richard Aldington (1930; New York: Dell Publishing, 1970), 174–79.

<sup>14</sup> Elias never seems to be really clear about when certain aspects of this civilization process developed. He comments, for instance, "In aristocratic court society, sexual life was certainly a good deal more concealed than in medieval society. What the observer from a bourgeois-industrial society often interprets as the 'frivolity' of court society is nothing other than this shift toward concealment" (*The Civilizing Process*, 146). Perhaps, however, we do injustice to Elias by assuming that he argued for a relatively swift paradigm shift affecting the world of the fifteenth century and contributing radically to the emergence of early-modern society. After all, as he underscores: "All this is symptomatic of a different standard of shame concerning the relations of the sexes. And through these examples one gains a clearer perception of the specific standard of shame which slowly becomes predominant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (ibid.). For Duerr's argument, see his discussion of the private versus the public especially with regard to sexuality in his *Intimität. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*, 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), 256–69.

<sup>15</sup> *Codex Karlsruhe 408*, ed. Ursula Schmid. Deutsche Sammelhandschriften des späten Mittelalters (Bern and Munich: Francke Verlag, 1974), 162–77.

<sup>16</sup> Gerd Dicke, "Mären-Priapeia: Deutungsgeshalte des Obszönen im 'Nonnenturnier' und seinen europäischen Motivverwandten," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 124, 2 (2002): 261–301, offers an overview of more or less parallel *priapeia* in medieval literature, with a specific focus on "Das Nonnenturnier."

shedding any significant light on the intention and meaning of our tale, the knight's self-castration, his discussion with his genital before he proceeds with the self-castration, the nuns' struggle to win the penis for themselves, and their lack of self-control and desire to enjoy sexual contact with men.<sup>17</sup>

The frankness with which this narrative addresses issues of sexuality and violence does not find true parallels in medieval literature, although recent research has unearthed numerous cases of obscenity dealt with by writers and artists alike<sup>18</sup>—whatever we might mean by this highly amorphous and also political term, 'obscenity'.<sup>19</sup> Both this aspect and the appearance of the text in the manuscript, marred by numerous mistakes in rhyme, meter, and syntax, have led Klaus Grubmüller to date it in the fifteenth century, a time when Shrovetide plays and *facetie* (Poggio Bracciolini) often addressed similar topics. But only seldom do we hear of a man who voluntarily castrates himself, and then, surprisingly, not even for any religious reasons (see, however, the Church Father Origen [185–254]), but because he is convinced that he might become more attractive to women.<sup>20</sup>

Whereas there are numerous accounts of castration in medieval literature and in historical accounts, whether we think of Peter Abelard's suffering or of the sorcerer Clinschor in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*,<sup>21</sup> there are no specific parallels to the events that structure "Das Nonnenturnier."<sup>22</sup> Theological or legal reasons for the castration are not at play here; instead the main purpose is, contradictory, of course, to the knight's original intentions and hence fully

<sup>17</sup> For the basic context and historical-literary information, see *Novellistik des Mittelalters: Märendichtung*, ed., transl. and commented by Klaus Grubmüller. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 23 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1996), 1330–40. For an alternative edition, see *Codex Karlsruhe 408*, ed. Ursula Schmid, 162–77.

<sup>18</sup> *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola F. McDonald (Woodbridge: York Medieval; Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2006); see also Valerie Allen, *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages*. The New Middle Ages (New York and Houndmills, Basingstone, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, James McDonald, *A Dictionary of Obscenity, Taboo & Euphemism* (London: Sphere Books, 1988), v–xi; Kerstin Mey, *Art and Obscenity* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2007), 5–18.

<sup>20</sup> A most remarkable exception proves to be the tale "Of a jealous man who castrated himself to prevent his wife's infidelity" (No. 225) in Poggio Bracciolini's *Facezie*, con un saggio di Eugenio Garin, introd., trad. e note di Marcello Ciccuto, testo latino a fronte (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1983), 354. Apprehending his wife's adultery, he castrates himself because he believes that he would then have absolute proof of her transgression in case she would get pregnant.

<sup>21</sup> Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler, "Kastriert, blind, sprachlos: Das (männliche) Geschlecht und der Blick in Wolframs *Parzival*," *Frauenblicke, Männerblicke, Frauenzimmer: Studien zu Blick, Geschlecht und Raum*, ed. eadem (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2002), 111–63.

<sup>22</sup> Curiously, Susan Tuchel, *Kastration im Mittelalter*. *Studia humaniora*, 30 (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1998), does not even know of this *mære*, although she discusses a selection of English, Italian, and German verse narratives that focus on the male genitalia, 276–87; Dicke, "Mären-Priapeia," offers a couple of more or less parallel narratives, but all other examples identify the reason for the castration with an emergency, an act of violence, or an accident.

illogical, if not absurd, to increase his own erotic power and to assist in improving his sexual attraction.<sup>23</sup>

Although the narrator of “Der turnei von dem zers” (The Tournament for the Penis<sup>24</sup>—this is the Middle High German title of “Das Nonnenturnier”),<sup>25</sup> seems at first to offer a fairly standard account of an honorable knight who is loved by all ladies at court, things quickly prove to be very different in comparison with traditional courtly tales. In fact, this *mære* might well be the most grotesque, if not pornographic, literary account ever composed in the Middle Ages, transgressing all ethical and moral norms commonly espoused by medieval writers.<sup>26</sup> Whereas we are customarily told of knights who woo ladies and have to struggle hard to win their love, here the opposite is the case insofar as the ladies vie to lure him into their beds and deem themselves lucky if they can convince him to spend the night with them: “die daucht sich fürbaß immer mere / beide hoffertig und here” (33–34; she considered herself from then on as courtly and noble). Ironically, whereas the epithets of “hoffertig” and “here” are usually reserved for knightly accomplishments at court in full view of the public and for chivalric deeds, here

<sup>23</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in the Middle Ages*, refers to castration several times (21, 30, 31, 39, 40), but she has nothing to say about the situation of castration as punishment or as a deliberate strategy as pursued here. Dicke, “Mären-Priapeia,” knows of several fifteenth- and sixteenth-century examples where a husband or a lover actually castrates himself, such as in Poggio Bracciolini’s *Facetiae*, in *Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles*, Straparola’s *Le piacevoli notti*, Schumann’s *Nachtbüchlein*, and Bandello’s *Le Novelle* (276–77).

<sup>24</sup> Literally, ‘tournament of the penis,’ which might add an additional ironic dimension since it would imply that all protagonists are determined by the power of sexuality.

<sup>25</sup> For a summary of the current level of knowledge about this narrative, see Werner Williams-Krapp, “Das Nonnenturnier,” *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*. 2nd, completely rev. ed. Kurt Ruh et al. Vol. 6, 3/4 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1987), 1180–82. Curiously, even in most recent collections and translations of late-medieval *mären*, our text does not attract any interest, perhaps because of modern sensibilities and a certain embarrassment about the obviously pornographic nature of our tale, see *Kleinere mittelhochdeutsche Verserzählungen: Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*. Ausgewählt, übersetzt und kommentiert von Jürgen Scholz-Grobert (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Williams-Krapp, “Das Nonnenturnier,” 1181: “Das ‘N.’ [“Das Nonnenturnier,” or “Der turnei von dem zers”] gehört zu den größten Schwänken der dt. Novellistik” [belongs to the most vulgar examples in the history of German short narratives]. Indeed, it would be difficult to identify any comparable narrative in any other medieval literature, though Poggio Bracciolini, in his *Fazetie*, developed rather risqué, if not openly pornographic, episodes as well. Moreover, if Williams-Krapp had turned his attention to sixteenth-century German short prose narratives by Kirchhoff, Montanus, Lindener, and Frey, among others, he would have not made such an absolutist statement. See Peter C. M. Dieckow: “Um jetzt der Katzenborischen art Rollwagenbücher zu gedenken – Zur Erforschung deutschsprachiger Prosaerzählensammlungen aus der zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts,” *Euphorion* 90, 1 (1996): 76–133; see also Albrecht Classen, “Didactic Laughter through the Literary Discourse: Martin Montanus as Entertainer and Social Critic. Epistemological Reflections Upon Human Life Through Laughter,” to appear in *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*.

they are used for obviously sexual matters concerning women's conquest of a male lover.<sup>27</sup> Rarely do we hear in medieval literature (and others as well) of women actively pursuing men, and if so, then the male authors usually inject a strong element of satire and criticism of such seemingly aggressive women, regularly revealing their dialectical approach to male sexual fantasies and ideas about women's sexual desires.<sup>28</sup> The only significant exceptions might be some medieval Spanish folk poetry, such as the *Morilla d'un bel catar*, where voyeuristic elements bring to light most graphic elements and bodily features.<sup>29</sup>

The young man is as successful in tournaments as in sexual adventures, and he seems to be perfect in every conceivable manner, at least from a purely male perspective and in light of male sexual fantasies. In other words, this young and actually foolish protagonist at first represents the dream of masculinity, being powerful and victorious both in chivalry and in erotic affairs, but the narrative seriously questions whether these imaginings are of true value and can sustain the foundations of courtly culture, especially in light of the most problematic gender relationship.<sup>30</sup>

He never has to struggle hard to gain women's favor, and in fact he has free access to sex wherever and with whatever woman he might want. We could draw

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<sup>27</sup> Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*. Rpt. Vol. 1 (1872; Stuttgart: S. Hirzel, 1979), 1251, and 1365–66.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the Middle High German courtly love songs by Der von Kurenberg, *Des Minnesangs Frühling*, ed. Hugo Moser and Helmut Tervooren. I: *Texte*. 37th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1982), 24–26. Similarly, if not much more aggressively, the thirteenth-century poet (pseudo?) Neidhart ridicules old women who actively pursue love and try to surpass all the young women in the battle for the man's love, such as in "Winder, / balde hin ûf dinen wec!" quoted from *Neidharts Lieder*, ed. Moriz Haupt. 2nd ed. newly prepared by Edmund Wiessner. Rpt of the 1924 ed. With an epilogue and a bibliography by Ingrid Bennewitz-Behr, Ulrich Müller, and Franz Viktor Spechtler. Vol. II (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1986), LIII–LV; or: "Ein altiu diu begunde springen," 3–5. In this case, old age adds another component to the satire of women actively pursuing a male lover. See now also *Neidhart-Lieder: Texte und Melodien sämtlicher Handschriften und Drucke*, ed. Ulrich Müller, Ingrid Bennewitz, and Franz Viktor Spechtler. Salzburger Neidhart-Edition, 3 Vols. (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007), Vol. 1, 470 (C 210–12).

<sup>29</sup> See Louise O. Vasvári, *The Heterotextual Body of the Mora Morilla*. Papers of the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar, 12 (London: Department of Hispanic Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1999), 69–91. James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 549–50, assumes that the transition from oral presentation of literary texts to silent reading by the end of the thirteenth century made possible the emergence of pornographic literature. Considering our example, however, there is no reason to assume that only silent reading facilitated the development of pornographic imagery. Both our *mære* and the Shrovetide plays, for instance, which certainly included, or were based on, pornographic elements, were intended for public performance or reading. See Johannes Müller, *Schwert und Scheide: Der sexuelle und skatologische Wortschatz im Nürnberger Fastnachtspiel des 15. Jahrhunderts*. Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700, 2 (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 1988).

<sup>30</sup> *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain*, ed. Amanda Hopkins and Cory James Rushton (Woodbridge: York Medieval; Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2007).

meaningful parallels with the verse narrative *Mauritius von Craûn* (ca. 1220/1230), where some of the same external constellations determine the narrative, except that the male protagonist does not completely achieve his goals and ultimately disappears from sight after having carried out an almost absurd tournament and after having basically forced his lady to sleep with him in her own marital bed (rape?).<sup>31</sup> Mauritius, and perhaps courtly society at large, or which he serves as a representative, proves to be a failure, at least under close scrutiny, because of his excessive demands on his lady and his inability to understand the limitations imposed on him by the ideals of chivalry and knighthood, as they were still powerfully, but perhaps also naively, reflected by Ulrich von Liechtenstein in his *Frauendienst* (ca. 1250/1260).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in our context (*Mauritius von Craûn*) traditional courtly love is replaced by raw sex which can be bartered for, undermining all values of courtliness and *fin'amor*, or *minne*, insofar as the traditional ideals and erotic emotions, especially the feeling of love, are getting increasingly lost. Not surprisingly, then, the focus here rests on the physical only, though happiness is not achieved at all since ultimately sex dominates everything with the utter exclusion of all spiritual and aspects.

In "Der turnei von dem zers," composed ca. 200 years later, basically in a dramatic extension of the travesty of courtly values already implied by the tragic plot development in *Mauritius von Craûn*, neither the tournament nor the wooing of ladies represents any difficulty for the young knight whose wishes are regularly fulfilled without him ever experiencing any opposition. All women fall for him, and the traditional roles in the gender game are actually reversed since they are begging him to visit them in their private rooms and to sleep with them, basically making it unnecessary for him to excel in knighthood and chivalry, although he still proves to be outstanding in this area. However, there is no word of *curialitas*, the ideal balance of social position and inner qualities many times publicly demanded and referred to in the literary texts as the basis of true nobility in the

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<sup>31</sup> *Mauritius von Craûn*, ed. Heimo Reinitzer. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 113 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Moriz, Tristan, and Ulrich as Master Disguise Artists: Deconstruction and Reenactment of Courtliness in *Moriz von Craûn*, *Tristan als Mönch*, and Ulrich von Liechtenstein's *Frauendienst*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 103, 4 (2004): 475–504; see also id., "Mauritius von Craûn and Otto von Freising's *The Two Cities*: 12th- and 13th-Century Scepticism about Historical Progress and the Metaphor of the Ship," *German Quarterly* 79, 1 (2006): 28–49. The protagonist's name has been spelled differently over time, either closely copying the manuscript version, or in a modernized version. For Ulrich von Liechtenstein, see Ulrich Müller, "Ulrich von Liechtenstein und seine Männerphantasien: Mittelalterliche Literatur und moderne Psychologie," *Ich–Ulrich von Liechtenstein: Literatur und Politik im Mittelalter: Akten der Akademie Friesach "Stadt und Kultur im Mittelalter" Friesach (Kärnten), 2.–6. September 1996*, ed. Franz Viktor Spechtler and Barbara Maier. Schriftenreihe der Akademie Friesach, 5 (Klagenfurt: Wieser Verlag, 1999), 297–317; see also the other contributions to the same section, "Gesellschaft—Tabus und Vergnügen."

high and even in the late Middle Ages.<sup>33</sup> Despite his personal happiness—we might actually question whether the knight actually experiences this happiness, or whether it is only a pretense to hide his inner anxiety, as he is constantly looking for a new conquest among the women at court—the ethical and moral conditions in that courtly society are not ideal, as the subsequent events quickly demonstrate, although the erotic imagination evoked in both *mæren* seems to be the same: men's free access to women and freely granted sex at any time without confronting any difficulties and challenges.

But let us first reflect for a moment on how the anonymous author of the *Mauritius* text had invited his audience to join him in the erotic escapades of his narrative. Every action in this verse novella is determined by the protagonist's erotic desire, whether he is building his enormous ship on which he is subsequently traveling most theatrically across dry land to reach the castle where his lady, the goal of his pirate-like journey on board his fake ship, resides, or whether he is fighting in the tournament triumphantly defeating all his opponents, apparently without any effort. He is considerably more concerned with gaining public honor as a knight, which he certainly enjoys both before his erotic adventure and afterwards once he has rejected his lady, than with endearing himself to his lady in cultural terms and also in their intimate encounter.

From one perspective, however, and in full conformity with traditional courtly values, Mauritius intends to impress the countess with his male prowess and thus to gain her favor, which then would allow him to make love with her. But we might have to question as well whether it is simply the final, basically monetary, or physical, prize for all of his accomplishments that he is aiming for. According to the classical Middle High German courtly romances his behavior at the end seems to be rather shameful and dishonorable, certainly contrary to the traditional values underlying courtly love.

Specifically, the hero goes one step further than other literary figures, which casts him in the same light as the young man in *Der turney von dem zern*, insofar as he considers all his efforts to win her love as a kind of barter and his lady's initial promise as a kind of contract that she would have to fulfill if he meets his part of the deal, that is, simply to organize a tournament on her behalf.<sup>34</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Joachim Bumke, *Höfische Kultur: Literatur und Gesellschaft im hohen Mittelalter*. Vol. 2 (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), 421–30; C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 145–53, et passim.

<sup>34</sup> For the significance of the tournament as a central activity and also metaphoric icon of courtly society, see *Das ritterliche Turnier im Mittelalter: Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Formen- und Verhaltensgeschichte des Rittertums*, ed. Josef Fleckenstein (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), especially the contributions by the editor himself ("Das Turnier als höfisches Fest im hochmittelalterlichen Deutschland," 229–56) and William Henry Jackson ("Das Turnier in der deutschen Dichtung des Mittelalters," 257–95). For a detailed analysis of the tournament in

after she has rejected him later because he had fallen asleep while waiting for her to arrive in the evening at their secret meeting place after the completion of the tournament, Mauritius pursues her violently and recklessly. He breaks into the marital bedroom, scares the husband almost to death, thereby knocking him out for the night, and then lies down in the bed next to his beloved. In this most unusual situation the countess decides to submit to her suitor's desires, embraces him and warms him up, so to speak, thereby inviting him to join her in sexual union, although it is no longer clear whether love determines their relationship or whether she would have agreed to this adulterous affair voluntarily under those circumstances.

Would this constitute rape? Would she have had any alternative? Could she have denied him his sexual wishes at this moment, after he had stormed into her bedroom, breaking down the door, pretending to take with him down to Hell her husband, who subsequently panicked, jumped out of the bed, hitting himself badly, and then fainted? Moreover, Mauritius then lies down next to her, all too determined to receive his part of the bargain, with no one there to prevent him from forcing himself upon her. Curiously, however, perhaps because of the lack of any further resistance, at that moment he seems to lose his erection and is suddenly helpless, or impotent. Quite explicitly, the narrator openly discusses the underlying sexual corporeality of courtly love in a most dramatic fashion, allowing no vagueness regarding the physical union of these two people to enter the picture, although he still resorts to the *Unsagbarkeitstopos*: "nu begunde er ouch erwarmen / und tet der frouwen, ichne weiz waz. / waz hulfe ez iuch, saget ich daz? / ez ist sus also guot, / ir wizzet wol, waz man tuot" (1614–18; then he warmed up as well and did with the woman, I do not know what. What use would there be if I told you about it? It is enough this way, you know anyway what one does [in such circumstances]).

Previously, the countess had determined not to submit to any wooer anymore and to terminate all efforts to join the culture of courtly love. Her 'no' had been most explicit, followed by unmistakable gestures when she left the meeting room where Mauritius was sleeping while waiting for her. Yet, now, with the former lover lying next to her, not capable of moving, almost frozen in his inability to make his body perform, she turns her attention to him and arouses his sexuality once again, thereby reversing the gender roles, which specifically reminds us of the conditions in "Der turnei von dem zers" where the treatment of sexuality within the world of the courts also leads to a topsy-turviness of the traditional gender relationship.<sup>35</sup>

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Mauritius, see Susanne Plaumann, "Theatrale Züge in der höfischen Repräsentation: Die Inszenierung des Turniers im 'Mauricius von Craün'," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 20 (2003): 26–40.

<sup>35</sup> For further discussions of these aspects, see, for example, Christa Ortmann, "Die Bedeutung der



The situation becomes even more difficult right afterwards because Mauritius, once having copulated with the countess, returns the ring to her that she had originally given him as a sign of her love and subsequently abandons her, never to come back because he feels deeply betrayed by her. Moreover, later one early morning, evoking the traditional dawn-song setting, the countess painfully mourns her loss and laments her own destiny, being eternally unhappy with her husband and having lost Mauritius as her lover. But for our purpose, the true issue here proves to be that the narrator has dramatically presented a sexual situation, positioning himself and his audience as voyeurs, witnessing the intimate scene in a most direct manner, though not describing it in fully graphic terms.<sup>36</sup> We know exactly what happened, although we are not told so explicitly. Our mind is eroticized, though the sexual act leaves a bitter aftertaste because of a certain, undeniable degree of violence, recklessness, and the absence of true love.<sup>37</sup> Mauritius has bought sex from the countess, but he rejects her after all because the barter was too expensive for him and not based on equal terms, at least from his perspective.

She, on the other hand, might have been justified in her initial rejection of her lover, especially if we compare the Middle High German version with its Old French source, the *fable* "Du chevalier qui recovra l'amor de sa dame." There the love affair develops well even after the conflictual situation because there the young knight respects the marriage, pays homage to his lady, and withdraws from the castle after an intriguing exchange with the couple. He transforms the demands for love into demands by an alleged ghost for forgiveness from the lady because of an ethical transgression on his part. The erotic dimension remains hidden, yet continues to be present, whereas in *Mauritius* the dramatic enactment of the sexual performance destroys the erotic altogether.<sup>38</sup>

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Minne im Moriz von Craûn," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* (Tübingen) 108 (1986): 385–407; Hartmut Kokott, "Mit grossem schaden an eere, V. 1718. Zur Minne-Lehre des 'Moriz von Craûn.'" *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 107, 3 (1988): 362–85; Waltraud Fritsch-Rößler, "'Moriz von Craûn': Minnesang beim Wort genommen oder Es schläft immer der Falsche." *Uf der mätze pfat: Festschrift für Werner Hoffmann zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. ead. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 555 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1991), 227–54.

<sup>36</sup> A. C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as V voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narrative* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). On a more theoretical level, Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 116–18, 149–54, et passim, explores the same issue.

<sup>37</sup> For further discussions of violence within courtly literature, see the contributions to *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Routledge Medieval Casebooks (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Albrecht Classen, "From Scandal to the Scandalous: From the Fable to Moriz von Craun," "Minne tuinget sunder slac": *New Studies Addressing Mauritius von Craûn*, ed. Maurice Sprague (Göppingen: Kümmerle, forthcoming).

In “Der turnei von dem zers,” a text which has attracted relatively little attention among literary scholarship at least until recently,<sup>39</sup> the narrative development reflects a comparable configuration, only that here the couple has already spent a night together, seemingly without having experienced any conflict. In fact, the lady tells him how much she would fulfill all his wishes and make him happy in every sense of the word: “wes euwer leip eins von mir begert, / des wert ir neunstunt gewert” (53–54; whatever you might ask from me, you will be granted nine times). Moreover, she appeals to him to grant her sexual satisfaction (56), though she complains somewhat about having been rejected by him for such a long time prior to that moment (59–60). As a compensation, she expects him to engage in all kinds of sexual activities: “so müsten wir vil beginnen, / ee das ich euch ließ von hinnen” (63–64; we must do many things before I will allow you to leave from here).

Again, just as in *Mauritius von Craûn*, love is translated into a crass and straightforward sexual contract as the lady makes an offer which he then accepts,

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Cramer, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im späten Mittelalter*, 2nd ed. (1990; Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995), does not know of this tale; Wolfgang Golther, *Die deutsche Dichtung im Mittelalter: 800 bis 1500*. With an epilogue by Manfred Stange (1912; Wiesbaden: Marix Verlag, 2005), cites a number of *mären*, but clearly steers away from those that hurt his moral sensitivity. Referring to short verse narratives in general, he comments, 394: “Aber sie versank auch immer mehr in Frivolität und Rohheit. Ihr gewöhnlicher Inhalt sind Liebesabenteuer, mutwillig, leichtfertig bis zur Unsittlichkeit. . . Wo aber die Geschichten im Schmutz und Unrat versinken und wo Grobianus in ihnen das Wort führt, sind sie unerfreulich.” The same applies to the recent selection of representative pieces in *Kleinere mittelhochdeutsche Verserzählungen*. For theoretical concepts regarding the issue of how to establish or to define the literary canon, which has profoundly affected the evaluation of these late-medieval tales, at least within the German context—neither Boccaccio’s *Decameron* nor Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* have experienced the same kind of exorcism—see Stefan Neuhaus, *Revision des literarischen Kanons* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002). He does not address medieval literature, but the implications of his arguments apply to our case as well. Surprisingly, Wolfgang Beutin, *Sexualität und Obszönität: Eine literaturpsychologische Studie über epische Dichtungen des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1990), despite his great interest in psychological readings and despite his expansive treatment of literary examples, does not deal with “Der turnei von dem zers;” Hans-Joachim Ziegeler, *Erzählen im Spätmittelalter: Mären im Kontext von Minnereden, Bispeln und Romanen*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 87 (Munich: Artemis, 1985), 233 and 342, only mentions our text in passing. Gerd Dicke, “Mären-Priapeia,” offers a comparative literary analysis, coupled with a psychological reading, whereas Ute von Bloh, “Heimliche Kämpfe: Frauenturniere in mittelalterlichen Mären,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 121, 2 (1999): 214–38, focuses on clichés, the gender discourse, and the element of anarchy within the world of the courts, which the pornographic-violent account combats through the rather bold humor. For a comparison of the Middle High German texts belonging to the genre of “priapeia” with late-medieval art objects, see Johan H. Winkelman, “Naturalia et Pudenda: Erotische insignes uit de late Middeleeuwen en hun literaire achtergronden,” *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 55 (2001): 223–38.

promising her to do his best, though he also requests her permission to leave her in the morning, and this for good (69). In other words, he is willing to share his body with her, but not his heart. This, however, constitutes the crux for the lady who desires to keep him as her partner and laments his desire to leave her immediately the next day, thereby degrading her into a simple sexual object that he can discard at any moment. She knows only too well that she cannot hold him, obviously in light of his previous behavior and his absolute success with other women.<sup>40</sup>

Consequently, not knowing an alternative, she turns to a different strategy and threatens him with divulging their secret to everyone, exposing him, as she utters in explicit terms, to public ridicule (88). Moreover, she resorts to a devious plan, threatening that she would malign him to all other women: "ich mach euch allen frauwen enwicht / und auß euch einen swachen man" (90–91; I'll make you a hated person among all women and will cast you as a weakling).

Interestingly, she is so assured of the success of her strategy that she states unequivocally: "'das kan nieman understan'" (92; "no one will be able to prevent this"). The young man, on the other hand, brutally rejects all her pleading and pledges never to return to her, clearly indicating that he had only used her as if she had been a prostitute, since he does not feel any emotional attachment to her (95–97). His additional arguments that it would hurt his honor and might endanger his life if he stayed with her (98–99), in a direct recourse to the genre of the dawn song in which the rise of the sun implies the unavoidable departure of the lover, are a mere pretext because he has become accustomed to being a kind of medieval Don Juan *avant la lettre*, whose only interest in women consists in his ability to conquer as many of them as possible without any care for the emotional relationship.<sup>41</sup> Physical dangers, stemming either from the woman's parents or her husband, seem never to have played any role previously in the knight's life and would have to be regarded as moot at this moment as well. Only his third argument, which directly aims at the lady's claim, if not demands, on him, might be convincing, especially since it indirectly also reflects his own previous behavior: "'was man nit gehabt mag mit eren, / das sal man billich enberen'" (103–04;

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<sup>40</sup> For a parallel case, see the behavior by Gahmuret in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. He promises to marry Herzloyde only if she grants him leave at regular intervals to attend tournaments, otherwise he would run away from her, as he has already done successfully in the past when the marriage bonds with Belacane had become too restrictive for him (Book 96, 25–Book 97, 4).

<sup>41</sup> Tirso de Molina was the first to develop the figure of Don Juan in his play *El burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* (first performance in 1613, first printing in 1630); see Elisabeth Frenzel, *Stoffe der Weltliteratur: Ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte*. 8th rev. and expanded ed. Kröners Taschenausgabe, 300 (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1992), 163–70.

"what one cannot get honorably, one should properly renounce [as non-desirable]").

But even here we discover an ambiguous value system because the knight simply draws from a traditional proverb and tries to apply it to his own life in order to defend himself against the lady's effort to conquer him almost like an object that she would like to possess.<sup>42</sup> In reality he has so far lived absolutely in contradiction to this proverbial wisdom and only refers to it now as part of his rhetorical defense measure. In other words, he applies double standards and claims one standard for himself, and rejects the same for the woman.

Only now does the lady turn to her most powerful, almost sinister rhetorical ploy, lamenting his own shortcoming. But first she offers him a warning: "'herre, macht es nit zu nötlich!'" (106; "Sir, do not force me to fall back to my last resort"). This shortcoming on his part proves to be his ugly and disturbing penis, the very object which had made their sexual union possible in the first place. Curiously, during the night she had obviously not had any objection to sleeping with him, but now she decries him as a miserable creature because his virile member would be disgusting for her and all other women. If he were to keep it for much longer, he would be hated by all women, and not one would want to be friends with him (113–14), fundamentally endangering his position as a successful Don Juan.

In a ridiculous, but obviously effective, rhetorical strategy she describes the physical reactions—the man's erection—as a horror for any woman who might want to hug him and rest on his chest. She suggests that true erotic happiness would result for him and his next sexual conquest if no penis would cause disruption in their happy embrace, certainly an absurd, but surely convincing argument for this ignoramus that surreptitiously destroys the basis of his previous position within the gender relationship. Shame would, as she argues, fall upon him if he continued to be so disfigured by his penis (120), hence by his very masculinity. The lady mocks him for his misunderstanding of what his penis means to women. Whereas he falsely assumes, she argues, that his genital would make him attractive to women, the opposite would be the case: "'pfi euch euwer boshait, das ir den so lieb habt, / da ir schanden und laster von tragt!'" (122–24; "shame on your evilness, considering that you are so enamored with it, which produces shame and disgrace for you!").<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Christoph Fasbender and Cordula Kropik, "Der turney von dem czers zwischen Kohärenz und Ambiguität," *Euphorion* 95, 3 (2001): 341–55, observe the same ambivalence, but they take the additional step to declare the possibility of reading the narrative from different perspectives, depending on the philological analysis, as the text's primary purpose, which certainly throws the baby out with the bath water.

<sup>43</sup> For recent examinations of medieval masculinity, see *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clara A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara. Medieval Cultures, 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey

Only once he would have castrated himself, would he truly gain women's love. Moreover, once he would have cut it off, women would actually chase after him and grant him all the honor that he so desires, as if that were not already the case, explicitly and contrarily to her argument because he still has his penis. In fact, if we examine closely her word choice, she implies sex here, as the verbs used in her sentence indicate: "so müsten euch alle frauwen loben / und nach euch wüten und toben / und gewünne<e> wirde und ere" (127–29; then all women have to give you praise and would lust after you, and you would win dignity and honor). This advice, however, would not be all, and she promises him even more if he were to listen to her. His castration would not mean the end of his life; instead she would have a salve which would allow him to heal quickly (132–35)—apparently an allusion to the magical salve with which a young woman heals Iwein from his mental sickness, allowing him to return to the life of the court, in Hartmann von Aue's eponymous romance (ca. 1200/1205).<sup>44</sup>

Surprisingly, but perhaps not quite unexpectedly considering the protagonist's limited intelligence, the knight accepts her recommendation and promises to carry out her wish because he trusts her best in the assessment of what will please all woment, an astounding anticipation, perhaps, of what Sigmund Freud is supposed to have asked much later: "Was will das Weib?"<sup>45</sup>: "ich wil es tun alles gern, / das

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Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler. *The New Middle Ages* (New York and London: Garland, 1997); *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley. *Women and Men in History* (London and New York: Longman, 1999); Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formation of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis. *Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005). See also the contributions to this volume by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux and Daniel F. Pigg.

<sup>44</sup> In Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein*, a maid, highly aroused by his nakedness and having free access to him because he is apparently in a coma-like sleep, covers the protagonist's body everywhere with the magical salve that her lady had secured from the Fay Morgana, here Feimorgân. Although her mistress had instructed her to use the salve very sparingly because of its value, in fact only for Iwein's head where his mental sickness rested, she rubs his entire body and uses up the entire content of her box. The voyeuristic perspective is self evident, focusing, though only indirectly, on the naked male body. The narrator carefully leaves out the middle section, deliberately avoiding any reference to Iwein's genital: "bestreich si in allenthalben / über houbet und über vüeze" (3476–77; she covered his body every [with the salve] from head to the feet). See Peter Meister, *The Healing Female in the German Courtly Romance*. *Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik*, 523 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990), 49–67.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.frauenzimmer.at/html/titel.htm> (last accessed on March 31, 2008); see also Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 2: *Years of Maturity: 1901–1919* (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 421; unfortunately, not even Jones gives a clear reference; instead he points the readers to a letter that Freud once wrote to Marie Bonaparte, without giving any date, or any other bibliographical information. For a solid collection of text excerpts relevant to this topic, see *Freud on Women: A Reader*, ed. and with an introd. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1990).

mir die frauwen holt wern'" (137–38; "I'll be happy to do everything which will ingratiate me with women"). In his absolute obsession to be the love object of all women, in his pompous arrogance and vanity, he entirely ignores how much he has hurt the present lady and how much she tries to get even with him: "'ich muß der frauwen hulde haben, / solt <man> mich darumb begraben'" (139–40; "I must enjoy women's love, even if I might have to be buried [alive?]"). Possibly, of course, and in all likelihood, her words carry the opposite meaning, especially when she had suggested that he should stone his penis to death: "ja solt ir in versteinen" (125), which could also mean: make it rock-hard, obviously in response to her true desires, as the subsequent events after his castration indicate.<sup>46</sup>

When the knight is alone by himself, he begins a discussion with his penis and accuses his anthropomorphized organ of bringing him down in his absolute and obsessive drive to gain women's love. The narrator, of course, explicitly condemns the young man for his utter foolishness, referring to him as an example of those people who do not know their own limitations and constantly strive for more than what would be good for them (144–48), a fundamental theme also in other contemporary texts, such as Heinrich Wittenwiler's *Ring* and similarly didactic-allegorical peasant satires where sexuality quickly comes to the surface and challenges the basic norms and values of society.<sup>47</sup>

Considering that erotic fantasy is involved in most literary discourse,<sup>48</sup> both medieval and modern, neither the didactic elements nor the battle between the genders as outlined by the poet in our narrative, needs to be discussed in greater detail here. Much more important for the exploration of the imagination as suggested by this *mære*, however, are the number of significant aspects revealed by this debate involving the man and his penis. The narrator identifies the latter as "edeln freien" (153; noble freeman), attributing him the rank of high nobility,

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<sup>46</sup> Fasbender and Kropik, "Der turney von dem czers," 345–46, allude to this reading, but quickly drop this possibility because they only aim to demonstrate that the narrative is determined by absolute contradictory ambivalence.

<sup>47</sup> Heinrich Wittenwiler, *Der Ring*. Frühneuhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch. Nach dem Text von Edmund Wießner ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt und herausgegeben von Horst Brunner. Durchgesehene und bibliographisch ergänzte Ausgabe (1991; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999); see, for example, the chapter dealing with the wedding festivities with its grotesque description of the peasants' greediness and lack of self-discipline, vv. 5533–6186.

<sup>48</sup> For theoretical perspectives, see Wolfgang Iser, *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Perspektiven literarischer Anthropologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991); cf. also Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Ideas of Creativity in Western Culture* (London, Melbourne, et al.: Hutchinson, 1988); Horst Albert Glaser, "Libri obscoeni—ein philologisches Divertimento statt einer Einleitung," *Wollüstige Phantasie: Sexualästhetik der Literatur*, ed. id. Reihe Hanser, 147 (Munich: Hanser, 1974), 7–24; Cora Kaplan, "Wild Nights: Pleasure/Sexuality /Feminism," *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 160–84. The erotic imaginary in medieval literature, however, has not yet been adequately investigated.

whereas the foolish knight calls it/him a “ungiftige slange” (155; non-poisonous snake), as if it were a powerful, yet by now useless tool. Why should a penis—not inadvertently associated with a snake, considering the snake reference in *Genesis*—be able to bite? And why would he naively believe the lady’s words: “du bringest mich gar enwicht. / und hett ich dein ni<ch>t, / ich were frauwen der liebste man, / so das leben ie gewan” (157–60; you bring me down. If I did not have you, I would be the one man who ever lived who would be most loved by women)?

In an absurd contortion of what the sexual union of man and woman implies, he bitterly complains about the disturbing penis that would always intervene and sneak its way between their bodies: “wan ich an weibes brust / lieplich bin gesmucket, / so hastu dich getrucket / und helst dich nirgent recht / und <hast> die minneklich erschreckt” (164–68; “when I have snuggled at a woman’s breast, you have [immediately] squeezed yourself [in between] and never hides properly, thus frightening the lovely lady”). This verbal exchange raises numerous questions: Is this young knight even aware of his previous behavior involving a large number of sexual contacts with many different women? Has he now acknowledged the allegedly threatening nature of his penis, and if that is the case, is he willing therefore to castrate himself? Not really, we would have to respond, because his basic intentions have not changed since he still wants to be the most attractive lady’s man possible and to exert absolute control over all women by means of his erotic prowess. It remains unclear, however, to what extent he is truly driven by his own sexuality, or whether his only real goal might be the physical conquest of all courtly ladies.

The misunderstanding results, it seems, from his inability to distinguish between the erotic and the sexual, or rather, from his foolishness in believing that erotic conquest could happen without any sexual implications. He specifically voices his being ashamed about the role played by his penis: “des muß ich mich derschamen” (169). Whenever he bows in front of a lady, his penis would show its head: “so hastu dich niedergelegt / und die minneklich erschreckt” (173–74; you hang down [or rather: stand up] and frighten the beautiful one).

It would certainly be absurd to assume that the poet argues as a radical feminist and intends to have all men castrated because the sexual penetration would be only hurtful and create physical pain for women. But he does not emerge as a misogynist either, unequivocally supporting men as sexually superior to women, hence justified in raping women whenever it pleases them. On the contrary, this medieval Don Juan is an utter fool who does not understand anything about the complex relationship between the genders and basically does not grasp the actual nature of sexuality, which naturally involves two partners and would, ideally, be the culmination of a true love relationship. Consequently, the knight finally declares his intention to cut off his own tool in order to become the favorite of all

women (175–80), but this not necessarily because he is really driven by sexual interests; instead, he pursues his goal for political reasons as he wants to be absolutely in charge and hold on to his power as the most attractive man at court, wielding complete control over all women.<sup>49</sup>

Intriguingly, but typically for the genre of *priapeia*,<sup>50</sup> the penis is also given a voice, and he knows well how to defend himself, distancing himself quite self-consciously, if not aggressively, from the knight whom he despises and rejects outright. He even declares his happiness, or relief, about the man's threats against him, that is his decision to free himself from his "zagele," because it would only mean freedom for him in absolute terms.<sup>51</sup> In fact, he characterizes the present owner, or carrier, as a "'böser man'" (185; "evil man") who would not even understand why women enjoy his greeting and are delighted to see him. Both the dignity and honor that he actually enjoys in public would be entirely the result of his sexual identity as a male, hence guaranteed by his penis, the most valuable part of his entire body (189–92), which he has, however, never acknowledged appropriately (193). In other words, the penis insists that sexuality is the all-

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<sup>49</sup> Considering that this *mære* does not really address sexuality per se, and instead utilizes the reference to sexuality as a literary means to probe the political power relationship between the genders, we are in a good position to grasp the ultimate purpose of most medieval erotic literature. Instead of pursuing simple erotic goals, courtly love poetry, even when it ultimately turned to graphic sexuality, if not pornography, had normally a political purpose. See, for instance, concerning high medieval literature, James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, 17, who has coined the intriguing term "aphrodisiac bodies." See now also the contributions to *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. Nicola McDonald. See also Caroline Jewers, "L'Esquiere, or What's in a Tail?" *The Old French Fabliaux: Essays on Comedy and Context*, ed. Kristin L. Burr, John F. Moran, and Norris J. Lacy (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2007), 69–81, for whom the ultimate message of this seduction story boils down to a simply masculinist obscene narrative: "it is about the display of masculinity, about sexual power that excludes women, as well as the hegemony of language, and the signifiers and signifieds comically conspire to celebrate, and comically undermine a myth, that of the phallus" (78). This conclusion, however, seems to contradict her own statement before and after, reflecting her justified anger about male pornographic fantasy and yet also her critical awareness that this *fabliau* offers considerably more than just literary material for sexual imagination. See also the contributions to this volume by Jennifer D. Thibodeaux and Daniel F. Pigg.

<sup>50</sup> Hanns Fischer, *Studien zur deutschen Märendichtung*. 2nd rev. and expanded ed. by Johannes Janota (1968; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983), 97–98.

<sup>51</sup> In other narratives, young women talk to their vaginas and also try to divorce themselves from their genital organs, which ultimately, however, proves to be impossible since either one is miserable and experiences public disrespect, if not shame, if they are without the other. Werner Williams-Krapp, "Das Nonnenturnier," 1181, mentions "Gold und Zers" and "Der Rosendorn." Werner Schröder, "Der Rosendorn," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, Vol. 8, 1, 182–85, underscores the complementarity of this narrative with "Der turnei von dem zers," but he does not offer any significant interpretation apart from his summary of the account in two different manuscripts. For a brief discussion of "Gold und Zers," see Werner Williams-Krapp, "Gold und Zers," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters*;, 76–77.



determining factor in the relationship between the genders. Moreover, the penis bitterly complains of having been badly neglected and dishonored, that is, of not having been assigned a worthy place on the knight's body: "'ir habt mich an ein stat gesetzt / und in einen winkel bracht (es het den bösten knecht versmacht), / so ir in irgent habt. / wißet, das mich sein betragt'" (194–98; you have put me at a place and hid me in a corner [the lowest ranked servant would have been insulted about it] that seems to be the worst. Let it be known that I am insulted"). Sarcastically he urges him to be more courageous and to cut the penis off, as a matter of fact, as this would finally allow them to determine who between them would actually exert the most appeal to women, the genital or the rest of the body. Again, the implied conflict concerns the tension between sexuality and love, body and mind, an issue that repeatedly finds expression in late-medieval verse narratives, such as in *Die Heidin*.<sup>52</sup>

But he dares him not only so as to demonstrate what women truly think about him; instead he also wants to expand this test and involve men as testimonies to whether eunuchs truly enjoy a high social rank and would be acknowledged as such by courtly society: "'das frauen und man sehe, / welchem under uns baß geschehe'" (201–02; "so that women and men can see who among us is faring better [without the other]"). Ultimately then, both here and in other priapeia, the basic function of courtly love is at stake since the knight had reduced it entirely to its physical, sexual function, and does not know anything about the amorous, spiritual, dimension.

The debate continues a little longer, with the knight resorting to insulting language and announcing that he would take the penis to a convent as punishment for his injurious statements, apparently because he assumes that the penis, as the ultimate icon of male sexuality, would be badly treated, if not destroyed, by the female members of this religious institution.<sup>53</sup> Again, however, the narrative resorts to highly slippery language, and this time even in a most

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<sup>52</sup> Albrecht Classen, "'Die Heidin' — A Late-Medieval Experiment in Cultural Rapprochement Between Christians and Saracens," *Medieval Encounters* 11, 1–2 (2005): 50–71.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Strohschneider, "*Der tûrney von dem czers*: Versuch über ein priapeisches Märe," *Liebe in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters: St. Andrews-Colloquium 1985*, ed. Jeffrey Ashcroft, Dietrich Huschenbett, and William Henry Jackson (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987), 149–73; here 170, suggests that the narrative investigates the basic meaning of civilization, self-discipline, chaos, and control. The transfer of the penis to the convent would signal that wild lustfulness, deeply seated in all people, can easily penetrate even the best guarded portals and overcome the most chaste individuals, nuns: "Er vermag es, jene Begierde anzustacheln, ohne ihr zu erliegen, also: völlig kontrolliert zu sein, um so die totale Form maskuliner Herrlichkeit, die größte Gewalt über die Frauen auskosten zu können" (It [the penis] succeeds in inciting desire without becoming subject to it; that is: to be totally controlled so as to enjoy the total form of male glory, the greatest form of violence against women). He also argues that the narrative reflects the process of civilization by way of suppressing the wild 'otherness,' which seems, however, to be more of a theoretical construct (172–73).

literal sense insofar as the knight threatens his penis with harsh and humiliating experiences once he would have placed him under a staircase in a women's convent. There evil smelling broth [sic] and other foul liquids would drip on him (226–27). This reference to waste products from the kitchen can only be read in highly erotic terms, as a reversal of the sexual act, as the imagined ejaculation is here described in an opposite process, with liquids not excreting out of the penis, but dripping onto him, perhaps in a not so subtle reference to the female sexual organ as represented by the entire convent in its anticipation of the sexual act.<sup>54</sup> The more the knight threatens the penis, the more he seems to gear up for an actual sexual act in proxy, though without his own involvement because of the castration. Ironically, we also would have to imagine that the women living in a convent have likewise, metaphorically speaking, castrated themselves, at least according to the religious ideals, whereas the kitchen, in its function of providing life-sustaining nourishment, reveals its actual, irrepressible connection with real life, hence also with sexuality.<sup>55</sup>

In total reversal of the real functions of all body parts, the young man, in hopeful, though imbecile, expectation of his future successes without the penis, exclaims that he would soon be able to experience the best possible sex: “darnach müssen wir sleifen / und manig rosenvarber munt. / mir wirt baß dausentstunt, / dan mir ie ist gewesen” (218–21; “afterwards we will slip [or slide], and so will many a woman with rose-colored lips. I will feel a thousand times better than ever before”).<sup>56</sup> Read between lines, these verses simply refer to the actual copulation of man and woman and evoke basic sexual fantasies. Grotesquely, however, this imagined experience would then have to happen without the necessary male body part, so somehow magically, but certainly together with a sexual partner, yet without achieving actual sexual union, the tragic experience of all eunuchs.

Whereas before the penis had threatened the knight with public exposure of his own failure, to be witnessed by men and women (201), who would subsequently

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<sup>54</sup> This sexual metaphor seems to be rather unique and finds no parallels in older courtly love poetry, see Stefan Zeyen, . . . *daz tet der liebe dorn: Erotische Metaphorik in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik des 12.–14. Jahrhunderts*. Item Mediävistische Studien, 5 (Essen: Item, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> Strohschneider, “*Der tlurney von dem czers*,” 169, suggests that the penis, hence sexuality, represents basic human instincts, and these in turn represent chaos and wilderness, lack of civilization. The entrance of the penis into the convent thus would constitute the return of barbarity and primitivism into the world of the nuns, or the church at large.

<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the verb ‘sleifen’ means nothing but ‘to slide,’ ‘to drag,’ or ‘to slip,’ Matthias Lexer, *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch*, Vol. 2 (1876/1979), 970–71. Possibly, in the late Middle Ages this verb might have assumed also a sexual meaning; see Stefan Zeyen, . . . *daz tet der liebe dorn*, 161, who identifies a late-medieval poem where the same verb implies the act of cunnilingus. In a more modern context, and also in various dialect variants, the meanings of ‘to sharpen a weapon,’ ‘to push into a hole,’ ‘to slip into a coat,’ but also ‘to cheat’ or ‘to steal,’ then also ‘to drill soldiers very hard,’ ‘to tear down,’ etc. are also possible, see Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 9 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1899), 590–602.

despise him as a eunuch, the former now resorts to the same strategy and warns the “zagel” of his public shame, again witnessed by representatives of both genders (223). In other words, both operate with the threat to shame the other because of fundamental shortcomings, whereas they utterly ignore the need to cooperate—a literary indication, hidden in the sexual imagery, of the need of society and its individual members to return to each other and establish a communicative community, both in ethical and moral, in physical and in erotic terms.<sup>57</sup>

No doubt, the narrator specifically intended his pornographic account for public enjoyment, but he also involves this public in the demonstration of male sexual prowess, and yet, in imaginary terms, without the penis. But this act of self-castration might also be life-threatening, as the repeated references to possible death imply. The lady had first assured the knight that the castration would not be really dangerous for him (131), forestalling possible resistance on his part. Later, the knight threatens the penis that he would not be able to survive the disgrace and suffering once it would have been cut off and placed under the staircase in the woman’s convent (224).

Once the knight has actually castrated himself and has applied the salve, we are confronted with a third reference to the threat to his life, but this time specifically with regard to the lady and her instigation: “er streicht der edeln salben dar; . . . / die hett im die frauwe geben. / sie bracht in nahen umb das leben, / doch wart er geheilet zuhant” (232–37; he placed the delicate salve, which the lady had given him, on the wound which would have almost killed him, but he was soon healed). The reason for the inclusion of these comments might be that the loss of sexuality would also represent the end of life; hence the narrative might suggest the importance of fertility and the creation of a new generation, whereas the existence of a convent, as we will see later, appears to be counter-productive for mankind at large in its biological make-up.

Considering the deliberate emphasis on the grave danger to life if sexuality in its physical process is not carried out or given any chance, which we have to understand as a facetious comment by the lady for her own, very specific purposes, we can conclude that the narrator was not only trying to create sexual fantasies, but also intended to suggest how much healthy sexuality is necessary for the well-being of the mature individual. Moreover, as Peter Strohschneider has observed, the absolute power of sexual lust finds a way to reach the surface even

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<sup>57</sup> For theoretical and pragmatic considerations of this concept as to be found in medieval literature, see Albrecht Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung : Die Suche nach der kommunikativen Gemeinschaft in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters*. Beihefte zur Mediaevistik, 1 (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2002).

within the almost sacred space of the convent because it is irrepressible and a life force.<sup>58</sup>

The knight, to be sure, emerges as a character who has practiced much sexuality, but he obviously does not understand anything about its true nature, being easily convinced by his lady that he might be able to enjoy even more pleasure, or rather public esteem, among ladies, without his penis. However, he quickly receives the necessary lesson, as the lady, to whom he rushes as soon as his wound has healed, hoping to gain her approval, suddenly reveals to him the true extent of his stupidity. Hardly has he informed her what he has done to his own body in order to please her and to win her love and that of all women, when she calls in more than hundred other women who beat him up badly, driving him away as an utter fool whose self-castration has caused so much pain to many women, depriving them of the possibility of experiencing sexuality themselves together with a man. The knight, however, will never learn from his lesson and can only puzzle over what has happened to him and why he failed in his final attempt to become the supreme Don Juan after so many successful sexual conquests.

Peter Strohschneider here observes a deep-seated fear of the powerful, sexually dominant woman who evokes a devastating inferiority complex in the man because he does not understand the essence of sexuality *per se*.<sup>59</sup> Yet, this fear is intimately coupled with profound attraction to all women, although the knight reveals his utter lack of comprehension of the fundamental meaning of sexuality and does not even know the basic functions of his own body parts. Despite his extreme sexual drive, he reveals a disturbing level of immaturity, which alerts us to a much more important level of meaning in this seemingly pornographic tale, concerning the relevance of individuality, self-awareness, mutual respect, and the recognition of sexuality as a basic and necessary force of life.

Significantly, the narrator identifies the lady as a "böse[ ] frauw[ ]" (250; evil woman) and as "die verflucht valentinne" (264; the cursed she-devil), perhaps in an allusion to Kriemhild in the *Nibelungenlied* who is also characterized in those terms because of her brutal actions in revenge for the murder of her husband, killing Hagen with her own hands as the last but one representative of the Burgundians.<sup>60</sup> She is called a she-devil because of having assumed a male function and of having threatened masculinity in its core. Here, however, the

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<sup>58</sup> Strohschneider, "Der tûrney von dem czers," 159.

<sup>59</sup> Strohschneider, "Der tûrney von dem czers," 158–59.

<sup>60</sup> *Das Nibelungenlied*. ed. Helmut de Boor. 21st rev. and expanded ed. Roswitha Wisniewski (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1979), strophe 2371, 4. For further discussions, see Otfrid Ehrismann, *Nibelungenlied: Epoche – Werk – Wirkung*. Arbeitsbücher zur Literaturgeschichte (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1987), 199–207. There is, of course, a huge body of more recent research on the *Nibelungenlied*, but it would be inappropriate here to engage with everything that has been said on this epic poem ever since within our context.

woman's guilt rests in having persuaded the young man to cut off his own penis, in having emasculated him, and in having misled him in his search for a better approach to gaining all women's favor, when he already enjoyed it and was only so greedy to ask for even more (141–48). But we also need to keep in mind how much she must have felt humiliated by this Don Juan *avant la lettre* in his rejection of this lady and in his treatment of her as a simple object of his primitive, irresponsible sexual desires. Moreover, she is not the only one to punish him for his misdeed of self-mutilation at the most sensitive and critical part, destroying voluntarily his sexual identity and removing the one organ which women want of men for their sexual satisfaction—at least according to this author and also very much in line with medieval concepts of allegedly insatiable female sexuality.<sup>61</sup>

Interestingly, she accuses him not necessarily of having cut off his penis, but of having hurt so many noble women: “werder weib im zu lait bracht” (267), meaning, in all likelihood, as we can deduce from the initial description of the knight's sexual performance, his abuse of every woman within his reach whom he only granted physical pleasure, whereas he had denied them any emotional commitment. The consequences for the knight support this reading because he is chased out of the city and has to spend the rest of his life in a cave hidden in the wild forest. His shame runs so deep that he never dares to return to courtly society, shedding tears for the rest of his life, in total thirty-four years (286), suffering as a miserable man until his death (287–88).

The devastating outcome of his erotic efforts is, significantly, the same as those suffered by Bertschi Triefnas (Little Robert with the Dripping Nose) in Heinrich Wittenwiler's allegorical verse romance *Ring* (ca. 1400) insofar as there the wedding celebrations result in bitter warfare between the two villages, again as a consequence of uncontrolled sexual desires by the wedding guests and the protagonist's inability to operate effectively on a social level. Bertschi survives as the only one left from his entire village, and withdraws into the forest once the enemy has lifted its siege, believing that their opponent has turned into a lunatic. He leads a miserable life as an hermit until his death, never again capable of establishing any relationship with the outside world because he has been metaphorically emasculated and has lost his entire social network, not to speak of the utter destruction of his village, the killing of his family and friends, and, most important, his bride (9655–99).<sup>62</sup> Because of the orgiastic living out of basic human

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<sup>61</sup> Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 80–81. See also the treatise by Constantinus Africanus, *De coitu*, ed. Lister M. Matheson, *Sex, Aging, & Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium: Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52, Its Text, Language, and Scribe*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 292 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 287–326. For the attitude toward female sexuality in the early modern era, see the contribution to this volume by Allison P. Coudert.

<sup>62</sup> Heinrich Wittenwiler, *Der Ring: Frühneuhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*. Nach dem Text von Edmund

instincts and the failure of all civilized behavior during the wedding celebrations, human existence comes to an end. Or, as we may say, uncontrolled and little understood sexuality destroys the bonds of civilized society — revealingly, none of the cities to which the villagers have appealed for help agree to join the battle. They know how to stay out of foolish strife, and, considering our context, how to control their sexual forces.

A first conclusion to be drawn from *Der turnei von dem zern* is that the narrator addresses fundamental gender conflicts within late-medieval society in which the power of sexuality has turned against people and takes them into the abyss of self-destruction because of a lack of self-control and a deplorable degree of immaturity. In particular, hypertrophied masculine sexuality experiences a dramatic, if not catastrophic, challenge and is soundly rejected, or rather, destroyed by means of a clever verbal strategy and skillful application of psychological machinations. Although the female protagonist is negatively characterized through hateful epithets, the narrative setting justifies her strategy as a successful revenge against the young man's extreme form of self-centeredness and greed. Moreover, the erotic, if not pornographic, account directly challenges his purely sexual approach to matters of love because the knight's intentions are entirely focused on gaining power over as many women as possible, without committing to any one of them in emotional, or subjective and intimate, terms.

The way the lady avenges herself is appropriate because she challenges his absolute obsession with himself and his self-defeating, narcissistic self-centeredness. These negative character traits make him even to distrust, because of her subtle argument, the relevance of his sexual organ. Accordingly he relies entirely on his manly charm, whatever that might mean in this context. As soon, however, as he has castrated himself, all his previous arrogance and pride are turned against him, and instead of enjoying many favors at court, he is chased away, ostracized, and so he loses his social identity as a knight.

The narrator openly addresses body parts and does not hesitate to incorporate a concrete discussion between the man and his penis whom he suddenly regards as his greatest enemy. However, as the knight has to learn immediately after he has been healed, sexuality belongs as much to his identity as his social graces and his chivalric skills do. The *mære* does not specifically criticize the common moral libertinage, and instead it openly tolerates the fact that practically every woman prides herself of having slept with him at least one night. However, as soon as the young man has deliberately and specifically rejected one lady for no apparent reason, his unrestrained promiscuity reaches its limit.<sup>63</sup> After having slept with her

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Wießner ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt und herausgegeben von Horst Brunner (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1991).

<sup>63</sup> For the concept of 'libertinage' in the Middle Ages, see Anne Kukułka-Wojtasik, "Littérature

finally, yet only after he has announced to her that he will never return to her a second time, he reveals how much he is recklessly victimizing her as part of his plan to conquer as many women as possible. Free enjoyment of sexuality, at least under special circumstances, finds the poet's approval, but not the abuse of individual women for purely sexual purposes, unless with the intention to gain public power. Consequently the young man's hubris is brutally punished, ironically through the same actions with which he had aimed at enhancing his sexual prowess and his power over all women. Considering the outcome of the first part of the narrative, I would object to labeling it 'pornographic' because it is not deliberately prurient and rather aims for moral and ethical teachings and intends to evoke social, political, ethical, and moral discussions.

But the narrative does not conclude with the story of the young man whose death is briefly alluded to after a quick summary of the thirty-four years that he has to spend in his cave all by himself in utter misery. Instead, the exploration of how to comprehend the meaning of sexuality in its most physical sense continues, but now within another context. After all, the anthropomorphized penis remains hidden under the staircase in the women's convent, living by himself for a whole year subject to the elements and without any recourse to help. Again, the narrator characterizes him as "edel[]" and "frei[]" (294; noble and independent), paying high respect to him, although he has to suffer from "armut" (295; poverty) and solitude (297). Finally, the penis decides to change his destiny and to present himself to the nuns and novices (or *oblatis*) in the convent. He knows very well the danger for himself if he leaves this miserable hiding place because he has to pluck up all courage to leave the secret space underneath the staircase and to expose himself, although it might mean death for him (300)—a subtle but unmistakable literary allusion to the sexual act itself once again.

Whereas before the narrative focus had rested on the man's inability to understand how to handle his own sexuality properly, the issue now turns to women's sexuality and their lack of self-control, a common theme in medieval literature intimately drawn from pervasive misogyny evident from the time of the Church Fathers onwards. At first, however, the poet introduces startling pornographic images because the penis stands up and erects himself in front of all the women who scream out loud when they discover him and recognize immediately its true nature: "doch sahen sie schiere, was es was" (318). Only one of the women feels actually threatened and urges her fellow sisters to burn the

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courtoise ou le *libertinage* avant la lettre: D'après les *Chansons* de Guillaume de Poitiers et *Joufroi*, roman du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 278 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 211–24.

penis or to bury it alive (320–21), to which the others, however, are adamantly opposed.

The narrator uses, of course, a heavy dose of satire in the subsequent lines when he has the nuns decide to give the penis a strong beating according to their own pleasure, as if it, once again characterized as a noble person (324), would be their personal enemy. The women happily accept this plan, but not because they really want to fight back the threat of sexuality. Instead, they quickly exhibit their true intentions, each of them hoping to chase the penis into her own room where she would be able to enjoy it for herself: “und zeigt im hin gein ir zelle” (338; and showed him the way toward her cell).<sup>64</sup>

The erotic imagery of the nuns using various kinds of sticks and whips to punish the penis would require an extensive psychological reading because of the explicit reference to fetish practices, but suffice it here to state the obvious that the poet deftly plays with sexual allusions regarding the women’s enjoyment of exerting violence on the male genital, which apparently allows them to substitute for their heretofore radically suppressed sexuality: “da kwam ein biederbe nunne frum, / die slug in mit einem reisentrum. / da sie im sechs slege hett getan, / an dem letzten lachtet sie in an” (347–50; then an honorable nun approached him and whipped him with a bundle of sticks. After having struck him six times, she finally laughed at him).

The narrator unabashedly mocks the nuns’ pretense of being morally superior to lay people and of disdaining sex publicly when he underscores the degree of enmity which they allegedly feel toward the penis. Of one of them we are told: “sehet, wie veint die im was” (354; see how hostile she was toward him). Indeed, soon enough their true desires are revealed as one of the nuns emphasizes how much enjoyment she would have if she could take hold of the penis and keep him in her treasure chest: “und hett manig gemach mit eren” (359; I would have much happiness and still keep my honor)— a thinly veiled metaphor of her sexual organs and her desire to sleep with a man. More specifically, the narrator comments that she would have liked to hug him and to push him into her “schoß” (362; lap; i.e., her vagina). Moreover, now from an authoritative point of view, once the convent’s sacristan has arrived, she lambasts the other nuns for mistreating the penis, which she tenderly identifies as the “dürst[] ding” (370; the

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<sup>64</sup> Contrary to common concepts today regarding the attitude toward sexuality in the past, the body in its sexual function was discussed rather openly, both here in our narrative and in numerous contemporary works throughout the entire Middle Ages and the Renaissance, whether this would confirm Elias’s theory, or the opposite one by Duerr. See *100.000 Jahre Sex: Über Liebe, Fruchtbarkeit und Wollust*, ed. Vincent T. van Vilteren and Rainer-Maria Weiss (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2003/2004); see also the much older, yet still relevant art-historical study by Eduard Fuchs, *Geschichte der erotischen Kunst: Das zeitgeschichtliche Problem*. *Geschichte der erotischen Kunst in Einzeldarstellungen*, 1 (Munich: Albert Langen, 1922), 158–76.



most valuable object), which God Himself has granted them in order to enjoy happiness (372).

Surprisingly, only now does the central topic come to the fore insofar as the nuns run into a serious conflict with each other, fighting over who would be entitled to own the penis. One of them insists that everything donated to the convent would be communal property, hence also the penis (386–88). Unable to reach any decision, they turn to their abbess for advice, who conceives a plan to organize a tournament to determine a winner who would be solely entitled to keep the penis for herself (400–02). At closer analysis, however, we realize that she not only contributes to a serious transgression against the monastic vows regarding sexuality, allowing the penis to stay in the convent and sanctioning the winner's free use of it, but she also encourages the nuns to enter into a sportive event normally preserved for knights only, and certainly most inappropriate for nuns.

In a similar, more or less contemporary, narrative, *Das frauen turnier*, a group of noble ladies also organizes a tournament, but they fight exclusively for public honor and their own enjoyment, without any sexual allusions implied by their chivalric enterprise, especially because most of them are married and only try to copy their absent husbands, with only one major exception, the true heroine of the tale.<sup>65</sup> This woman, unnamed here, adopts the name of a well-known duke and fights with great bravado, winning the respect of all involved for her manly performance. Her reputation quickly spreads, despite the women's attempt to keep their tournament a secret, all over the country, even reaching the duke who later comes to visit the heroine and to pay his respect, rewarding her with so much wealth that she is finally able to marry honorably. Ultimately, then, even in *Der frauen turnier*, women engaged in the male activity of fighting in a tournament are identified as active pursuers of a sexual partner. But we might argue that most medieval tournaments indirectly also served the function of supporting erotic goals, making it possible for women to determine their ideal husband.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For an edition, see Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, ed., *Gesamtabenteuer: Hundert altdeutsche Erzählungen*. Vol. I (1850; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), 367–32. Sarah Westphal-Wihl, "The Ladies' Tournament: Marriage, Sex, and Honor in Thirteenth-Century Germany," *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judith M. Bennett, Elizabeth A. Clark, Jean F. O'Barr, B. Anne Vilen, and eadem (1976; Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 162–89. See now my article "Masculine Women and Female Men: The Gender Debate in Medieval Courtly Literature With an Emphasis on the Middle High German Verse Narrative *Frauenturnier*," to appear in: *Mittelaltinisches Jahrbuch*.

<sup>66</sup> One of many examples would be Konrad von Würzburg's *Partonopier und Meliur* (ca. 1270) where Partonopier can prove his worthiness as Meliur's marriage partner only after he has accomplished the greatest triumphs in a tournament, defeating the strongest participant in the battle for the hand of Meliur. For a slew of recent critical studies on this text and its European parallels, see *Partonopeus in Europe: An Old French Romance and Its Adaptations*, ed. and with an introd. by Catherine Hanley, Mario Longtin, and Penny Eley. *Medievalia* 25, 2, Special Issue (2004).

In our 'pornographic' tale, however, the narrative aims to create a sarcastic, facetious parody of traditional male activities suddenly carried out within a monastic setting where, grotesquely, a penis represents the prize for the winner. Whereas the women in the former narrative gain a certain degree of public respect for their efforts, despite the transgressive nature of their performance, in "Der turnei von dem zers" the tournament only serves the purpose of determining who among the nuns would be worthy to own the penis, an absolute travesty of monastic rules. This *mære* therefore might be, as Peter Strohschneider has hypothesized, a literary attempt to probe the limits of civil society and to experiment with sexual transgression as a means to identify where these limits are actually located.<sup>67</sup>

In this tournament, however, the women aim to display their social worthiness, as the abbess announces, in complete contradiction to her duties and obligations: "'und sehet, welche die werdest sei'" (408; "and find out who is the worthiest"). Ultimately, however, none of the nuns is really concerned with her social identity; instead they all betray nothing but sexual lustfulness, hence deliberately ignoring their rules, ethical norms, and moral ideals as members of a Christian convent.

Nevertheless, in both narratives the tournament takes place at a secret place, with doors locked: "der solt haimlich zergan" (411; [the tournament] was supposed to run secretly), which indicates that the women are aware of the inappropriateness of their behavior within male-dominated society. Moreover, in preparation for the tournament, the abbess parades the penis, honorably placed on a silken pillow, to an open space where they can joust against each other and celebrate the event with festivities and joyfulness in direct imitation, but also as a parody, of the traditional courtly tournament (425–30), which again reminds us of the seemingly conformist, traditional verse narrative *Mauritius von Craûn* where the tournament ultimately assumes absurd dimensions and only serves the male protagonist as a stage for his extraordinary, yet also ludicrous knightly skills.<sup>68</sup>

Ironically, the nuns carry a banner with them showing a naked man (434), betraying their true intentions to gain access to sex in the secretiveness of the enclosed space of the convent. The object of their desire, the penis, is positioned in the center, and a flag is raised above him (437), indicating that male sexuality has claimed power over the religious community. The narrator mentions that they stood in a circle and gazed at the genital, each of them filled with burning lust: "iekliche lak uf dem gedinge, / ob sie des ersten uf in kweme" (440–41; each was determined to get hold of him first), a clear reflection both of male fantasies

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<sup>67</sup> Strohschneider, "Der tårney von dem czers," 172–73.

<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, not one contributor to the volume *Das ritterliche Turnier im Mittelalter*, refers to our narrative, which would have served as a remarkable counter-example for the decline in courtly values and knightly ideals at the end of the Middle Ages. See also David Crouch, *Tournament* (2005; London and New York: Hambledon and Continuum, 2006), 149–59.

regarding women's interest in male bodies, and of public distrust of nuns' vow of chastity as nothing but foolish pretense of chastity which a simple intrusion of images of the male body could quickly deconstruct.<sup>69</sup>

Whereas the nuns' tournament, grotesque in itself considering the context and the participants, quickly turns into a very bad brawl without any rules in which each woman tries to hurt the others physically as much as possible, the penis is described once again as a most beloved object. The narrator uses the ponderous, rather complex term "hort" (453; treasure), well known especially in the tradition of heroic epics (e.g., *Nibelungenlied*),<sup>70</sup> and he also resorts to the expression: "das kluge engelin" (456; the clever little angel), indicating how much the male genital escapes simple definition and evaluation. The irony of the entire situation is increased through the combination of military language with specific references to the life in a convent: "der turnei wert uf komplet" (457; the tournament went on until compline). The battle for the penis, pornographic and hilarious at the same time, quickly intensifies, leading to serious injuries for many participants who suddenly, in their greed and sexual lustfulness, remember all kinds of insults that they had suffered from their fellow-sisters in the past but which they never had been able to come to terms with satisfactorily, which consequently increases their aggression against each other: "sie gedachten an den alten haß" (463; they remembered the old hatred). Not only does the convent emerge as a prison-like

<sup>69</sup> See also the Old French *fabliau* "Des trois nonnes qui trouvèrent un vit," critically discussed by Jacques Ribard, "Et si les fabliaux n'étaient pas des contes à rire?," *Le rire au moyen âge dans la littérature et dans les arts: Actes du colloque international des 17, 18 et 19 novembre 1988. Textes recueillis par Thérèse Bouché et Hélène Charpentier* (Talence: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux: 1990), 257–67. See also Gregory B. Stone, "The Insistence of the Body in the Old French Fabliau 'Estormi'," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 449–73. For a new text edition, see *Nouveau Recueil complet des fabliaux (NRCE)*, publiés par Willem Noomen. Vol. VIII (Assen, NL: Van Gorcum, 1994), no. 96, 269–77. F. R. P. Akehurst, "Customary Law in the Old French Fabliau," *The Old French Fabliaux*, 42–54; here 51, argues that the debate over the true ownership of the phallus reflects the increasing concern with legal measures in late-medieval society. The thematic differences to the Middle High German *mære*, are, however, quite noteworthy since here three nuns on a pilgrimage come across a penis at the side of the road. One of them immediately claims ownership, and the two others fight with her over the object. When they finally ask an abbess for a judgment, the latter examines the penis and declares that it is the door bolt ("le toraill de nostre porte," 88 [ms. E; "nostre porte le verrous," 92, ms. M]) to the convent that had been lost several days before. She then confiscates the penis, leaving the three nuns empty handed.

<sup>70</sup> Even in the *Nibelungenlied* "hort" could represent more than simply 'treasure' or 'wealth.' At the end, when Kriemhild is about to get her revenge with Hagen, the murderer of her husband, Siegfried, she demands from him, in the last minute, the restitution of her previous happiness, which would be, however, impossible. Hagen then specifically resorts to the term "hort" and underscores that she would never see it again: "'... jâ hân ich des gesworn, / daz ich den hort iht zeige, die wîle daz sie leben / deheiner mîner herren, sô sol ich in niemene geben'" (stanza 2368, 2–4; I have sworn that I will not reveal the treasure to anyone as long as any of my lords is alive, and I will not give it to anyone else).

institution where women must forcefully suppress their sexuality, but also as an establishment where bitter competition, internecine strife, hatred, jealousy and envy, and other forms of aggression dominate.

Moreover, once all self-control and discipline have been lost, the young novices, who had observed the nuns from the outside, for a while still paying respect which is traditionally due to the older women, also enter the fray, entirely disrespecting all rules banning them from the secluded space preserved for the nuns. They correctly conclude that considering the sexual lure of the penis, which has already totally gripped the nuns, all authority has been abandoned and brute force has become the new principle guiding all behavior within the convent, especially because the abbess herself had announced that they all would be entitled to fight for the prize in the tournament, which would consist of the penis, or uninhibited access to sexuality. They also believe that the fighting would not actually threaten their life (485)—in remarkable contrast to the comments uttered in the first part of the narrative regarding the castration—whereas transgressing the ban against the novices, issued by the nuns, now seems to be nothing but the attempt by the latter to enjoy sex privately and to keep the penis only for themselves (486–90). The narrator specifically indicates how much these girls, obviously post-puberty, are also filled with sexual desires and demand to gain their own satisfaction just as much as the nuns, whom they accuse of hypocrisy and double standards: “ein mait hat gern als ein frauwe, / und tut ir oft dick als not” (492–93; “a young woman enjoys it as much as an older woman, and often does it as well when she needs it”).

Undoubtedly, the text implies how much late-medieval convents were regarded with suspicion concerning their allegedly high moral and religious standards. Moreover, the poet presents images of great tumult and violence, of intense fighting and screaming, not uncharacteristic of countless medieval accounts of warfare and tournaments, now, however, within a religious context involving only women, considerably adding to the satirical nature of his account: “sehet, da hub sich erst ein geschrei! / sie schreiten fraislich: ‘slach und stoß!’ / ir aller vechten das was groß” (498–500; look, then loud shouting could be heard! They screamed in a terrifying manner: “hit and blow!”). The older nuns, apparently in a minority and not as strong as the young women, suffer badly: “sie gerten alle einer ru. / sehet, die gieng in nicht zu” (505–06; they all desired respite. But see, they did not receive it). Confronted with the penis, then, traditional authority and power is for naught, whereas now raw, physical force and violence dominate the field.

To add to the highly ironic comedy, the narrator points out that the abbess was struggling in the middle of the fight, striving hardest to get hold of the penis, delivering blows to everyone like a blacksmith: “und dünst recht als ein smitte” (510). But instead of granting these women respect for their hard struggle, and for their success in imitating knights in a tournament, as is certainly the case in *Das*

*frauenturnier*, the poet describes them as fighting like cats (513–14) and as acting like sows: “das sie kurren als die seuwe” (515; that they grunted like sows). Worse even, many of the women who originated from noble, knightly families, are said to ‘scream like pigs’ (516) because they all suffer from extraordinary violence, though not in terms of knightly battles, but in a primitive manner, hitting each other, pulling hair, punching, and the like (520–23), displaying most boorish and beastly behavior, recklessly hurting each other only because they want to gain control of the penis, adding insult to injury, making themselves look ridiculous and casting a most negative light on the institution of medieval women’s convents, a quite common theme in late-medieval literature with its strong tendency to incorporate anti-clerical sentiments.

A comparison with the struggle that breaks out at the end of the wedding celebrations in Heinrich Wittenwiler’s *Der Ring* where the peasants in an equally brutal manner fight against each other for no significant reason, would be a worthwhile enterprise, especially because there crude sexuality also seems to be the root evil for the eruption of deadly violence. But whereas Wittenwiler aimed his grotesque sarcasm at the peasant class,<sup>71</sup> though they certainly served only as representatives of mankind at large, in “Der turnei von dem zers” explicit sexuality and violence are correlated in order to critique women’s, and especially nuns’ behavior. The poet’s strategy achieves its purpose insofar as his biting satire of women’s sexual lustfulness, combined with his criticism of nuns’ pretenses to be chaste, comes to complete fruition. Since the abbess proves to be most lustful and disrespectful regarding her own vows of chastity, the other nuns cannot help but to follow her example. However, despite all their efforts and furious struggles, none of them reaches the desired goal to get hold of the sexual object for herself; hence violence, just as in Wittenwiler’s *Ring*, undermines sexuality, not to speak of love, and makes it impossible to experience it in any fulfilling manner—an observation that would certainly pertain to *Mauritius von Craûn* as well.<sup>72</sup>

The poet even describes how a nun and one of her novices fight against each other, the older woman desperately appealing to the younger to remember the nine years during which she had taken care of her and to be grateful now,

<sup>71</sup> For a comprehensive interpretation of this allegorical verse narrative, see Eckhart Conrad Lutz, *Spiritualis fornicatio: Heinrich Wittenwiler, seine Welt und sein ‘Ring’*. Konstanzer Geschichts- und Rechtsquellen, XXXI (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990).

<sup>72</sup> See my comments in the prologue to my translation, *Moriz von Craûn: Mittelhochdeutsch / Neuhochdeutsch*. Mittelhochdeutscher Text nach der Ausgabe von Ulrich Pretzel. Übersetzung, Kommentar und Nachwort (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1992), 167–73; Dorothea Klein, “Mauricius von Craûn’ oder die Destruktion der hohen Minne,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 127, 3 (1998): 271–94, basically confirms and reiterates these observations. For an analysis of the deeply pessimistic concepts concerning cultural development, love, and self-fulfillment, see Albrecht Classen, “*Mauritius von Craûn* and Otto von Freising’s *The Two Cities*,” 28–49.

abstaining from hurting her. But all this is to no avail, since the sexual obsession has so much taken control of everyone that the young woman rudely rejects the appeal and threatens the authority figure with death: “‘gebt mir den zägel drat / oder ich slach euch zu tot’” (535–36; “give me the penis, or I’ll kill you”). Yet, even these two participants in this absurd tournament have no success and prevent each other from achieving their goal (544).

Another older nun attempts an alternative strategy, offering a young novice a compromise, granting her possession of the penis, if she herself can hold it in her safe-keeping: “‘laß mich sein behelter sein!’” (554; allow me to be its guardian). Despite this good attempt, the young woman resolutely rejects it, afraid of not being able to trust such a promise, insisting, instead, on getting the penis all for herself since then she would never have to beg for it (560–62). In short, whatever values, morals, or ethics the nuns might have tried to instill in their students, all these are now lost and forgotten in face of the irresistible lure of sex. This sounds very much like an indication of broad anarchy, but certainly not of a grotesque situation, as Klaus Grubmüller and, following his lead, Ute von Bloh have suggested.<sup>73</sup> The old institution of a women’s convent is at stake here, but the poet does not intend to outline a recipe for society’s collapse in face of sexuality. On the contrary, he criticizes traditional misunderstanding of sexuality by men and women and argues, through his highly facetious, obviously also pornographic (at least on the surface), account, for a solid reassessment of the traditional gender relationship in which sexuality should be embraced as nature’s life force.

Ironically, in the last minute one of the women—her identity remains unknown—steals the penis and gets away with it, which proves to be an advantage for everyone, however, because otherwise, as the narrator underscores, the tournament would have turned into deadly violence (568), as is the case in *Mauritius von Craûn* both at the beginning with the count of Beamont killing an anonymous opponent (906), and at the end when the jongleurs fight over the distribution of the valuable parts that had made up the magical ship (1051). Nevertheless, the results are bad enough, as many of the women have lost blood, suffer from bad pain, and are beaten black and blue. Many of them have some of their hair pulled out, but the worst proves to be, which will not require much interpretation, that their veils and caps have been soiled and are torn (589–91), all of them lying on the ground, a pathetic reflection of what male fantasy projected about the true life behind the wall of the convent.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Klaus Grubmüller, “Das Groteske im Märe als Element seiner Geschichte: Skizzen zu einer historischen Gattungspoetik,” *Kleinere Erzählformen des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger. *Fortuna vitrea*, 8 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), 37–54; here 48–49; Ute von Bloh, “Heimliche Kämpfe: Frauenturniere in mittelalterlichen Mären,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 121, 2 (1999): 214–38; here 217–19.

<sup>74</sup> von Bloh, “Heimliche Kämpfe,” 225. It does not make much sense in this context to argue, as von

Although none of them has gained control of the penis, here disregarding the one nebulous figure who steals the communally desired object poignantly representing male sexuality, the symbolic language indicates that they have all lost their virginity, as the true winner proves to be the penis, or male sexuality, despite its sudden disappearance. As the narrator finally comments, many of the women have revealed what their true desires consisted of: "sich het manig geunert / umb den minneklichen funt" (594–95; many would have abandoned their honor in return for the lovely discovery [of the penis]). The nuns plead with the young women who so far had been under their care and authority, to keep silent about the tournament and to stay with them in the convent, which indeed happens, and the narrative concludes with these comments, without ever returning to the foolish man who had castrated himself.

Undoubtedly, the anonymous poet addressed a male audience and invited his listeners to enjoy the sexual fantasy with him. But the message is not as clear as the conclusion of the second part indicates, especially since the first part had also included serious criticism of male behavior in the complicated intercourse between men and women. In both parts the enjoyment of sexuality is evaluated from a positive perspective insofar as the castration is severely condemned and the self-imposed chastity ridiculed. The issue addressed here concerns the proper understanding and handling of sexuality, as the excess in such matters both times leads to violence, frustration, and despair. Despite the seemingly pornographic, simply erotic and entertaining nature of this account, however, we can identify deeper levels of meaning, as is so often the case with allegedly pornographic texts from the Middle Ages, such as Poggio Bracciolini's *Facetie*.<sup>75</sup>

In the first part the poet indicates his criticism of brutal abuse of women for sexual purposes, and in the second part he ridicules nuns who artificially try to suppress their own sexual desires. Man's sexuality has to meet the demands of female sexuality, and the mismatch, as illustrated in both narrative sections, has catastrophic consequences because the representatives of both genders reveal alarming ignorance of the true needs of their own bodies. The young man proves to be guilty of self-delusion and ignorance, not understanding his own instincts and the basis of the sexual process. The nuns and their novices, on the other hand, have isolated themselves foolishly—at least according to the author's

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Bloh does, that this sexual fantasy would be the result of male fear of castration. On the contrary, the mighty penis achieves its goal even better than the knight in the first part of the tale, serving as his representative in the convent.

<sup>75</sup> Poggio Bracciolini, *The Facetiae*, trans. Bernard J. Hurwood (New York: Award Books, 1968); for a selection of his narratives in English translation, see *Eroticism and Love in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen. 5th ed. (1994; Mason, OH: Thomson Custom Publishing, 2004), 575–81. For a discussion of similar "priapeia," see Dicke, "Mären-Priapeia," 276–94.

opinion—from real life and hence fall into a hysteric rage over who can claim the penis for herself once they are suddenly confronted with it. Ultimately, they all seem to have been raped, or at least have lost their chastity, considering the symbolic language of the torn veils and other pieces of their monastic clothing.

In all likelihood, the male poet wrote for a male audience, providing them with literary material that serves for the reconfirmation of their masculine identity, although we can also detect important elements of global ethical and moral teachings. Not surprisingly, the object of the nuns' desire, the *zagel*, is characterized as "minneklichen" (595; lovely), an epithet traditionally reserved for the world of courtly love in its highest, almost esoteric quality. However, this "minneklichen funt" (lovely object of discovery) is immediately weighed by money, "zehen pfunt" (596; ten pounds), destroying the false impression and bringing us down to the level of commerce and, in fact, prostitution.

At the end, the feminine, religious community in the convent, based on monastic vows and rules, mutual respect, the nuns' authority, and love of God, is reestablished insofar as the nuns appeal to the novices to keep quiet about the terrible fracas within the walls of the nunnery and to stay with them as good friends as in the old days of their sexual innocence: "und bei in in dem klonster pleiben / lieplich hin als her" (600–01; to stay in the convent as good friends like previously). Significantly, however, the eroticized male body has been determined as the all-powerful source of all their strife and conflict, their violence and hatred. As soon as the penis has disappeared, hence also the lure of sexuality, the women regain their good sense and reestablish their community and devotion to each other.

By contrast, in the first part of the narrative, the removal of the penis, hence the loss of male sexuality, destroys the harmonious and erotic relationship between men and women. In other words, sexuality is not necessarily condemned as a threatening force, whereas its impact on and function within specific social settings are examined from different perspectives. Not one of the protagonists emerges as particularly intelligent and foresightful. In fact, none of them understands how to handle sexuality properly, so all become victims of their own ignorance. The knight only abuses his erotic attractiveness on courtly ladies without comprehending its actual character. The lady who advises him to castrate himself does not foresee the extent of his stupidity and cannot imagine what effect her own words would have on him; consequently she chases him away when she learns of the horrible act of self-mutilation. The nuns, on the other hand, prove to be entirely innocent and naive and do not know how to handle the sudden appearance of the penis, hence, of male sexuality, within their secluded space of the convent.

For all of characters in this *mære*, the consequences are catastrophic. While the knight loses his identity and suffers for the rest of his life in self-imposed isolation



far away from society, the lady loses her lover and the possibility of enjoying sex. The nuns and their novices lose their honor, they almost kill each other, and they severely undermine the stability of their community, not to speak of their deliberate breaking of their vows of chastity.

Altogether, the poet reveals how much sexuality affects every person irrespective of his or her social status, his or her religious position, and his or her gender identity. Everyone is filled with desire for sexual gratification, but no one in our narrative knows how to handle this fundamental force properly. Whereas the knight experiences too much of it, the nuns have too little, or rather, none. The lady tries to control it, but she destroys it also by her foolish rhetorical strategy, hoping to keep the knight for herself after he had rejected her for such a long time.

In addition, to return to our initial theoretical reflections, "Der turnei von dem zers" openly addresses the profound impact of the male genital on female fantasy as the poet allows it to be anthropomorphized in order to entertain his audience for sure, but also to bring to light the crucial issues associated with sexuality, the body, and gender differences. Despite the obvious intention of developing literary material that could instigate sexual fantasies, the truly underlying theme proves to be the immense danger resulting from the inability to handle the forces of sexuality, which here ultimately destroys the social community in which the knight had lived. The nuns would have faced the same destiny if they had not been fortunate enough to lose the penis out of sight just in time because one of them carries it away stealthily. It remains unclear who the thief might be, though, considering the context, it could have been only one of the nuns, or one of the novices, but this point cannot be pursued further because the narrator breaks off at that point.

On a psychological level we might argue that copulation has occurred, especially considering the bloody and disheveled appearance of the exhausted and distraught nuns. Hence, once the sexual energy has been spent, that is, once orgasm has occurred, the tensions disappear and the old communal bonds can be forged again. Of course, this is not the case with the knight and his lady, but he catapults himself out of society because he deliberately, though ignorantly, destroys his own sexual identity and thus becomes a *persona non grata* because he has become intolerant for all of society.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> von Bloh, "Heimliche Kämpfe," 234, observes that the revolt against their own sexual role identity regularly met a violent response, but she also admits, rightly, that according to medieval authors the manifestation of sexual desire was a dangerous moment in the life of an individual. Ultimately, however, and this would be the necessary corrective, von Bloh also acknowledges that this narrative, like so many others that openly deal with sexuality, is determined by a certain degree of ambivalence, insofar as fantasy, fear, and aggression interact, without absolutely clear markers of what constitutes the proper social role and gender distribution (237–38).

Heinrich Wittenwiler, in his allegorical poem *Der Ring*, dealt with the same issue, though in a different context, that is, in the world of peasants and their attempts to arrange a wedding. Beforehand, however, the author describes the initial erotic relationship between the young man Bertschi and the farmer's daughter Mätzli Rürenzumpf, which does not quite develop as it should have, which should not surprise us considering the social background and the protagonists' utter lack of understanding of all cultural aspects, hence also of love, sexuality, and communication.<sup>77</sup> Once Bertschi's scribe has thrown a stone, to which Bertschi's love letter had been attached, into the attic of Mätzli's house where her father had locked her in to protect her from any erotic adventures, inadvertently hurting her head, a dramatic series of events sets in that share many thematic aspects with *Der turnei von dem zergen*.

Since she is wounded and yet also knows that the letter contains an important erotic message, she has her father take her to the village doctor Chrippengra (the Grabbing Crawl) whom she asks to read the letter and to write a response for her. Chrippengra, however, immediately abuses the young woman and forces her to have sex with him. At first he orders all people out of his "clinic," to use a modern word, in order to help her with his medication, "der wurtzen" (2026; the root)—by itself already a strong sexual metaphor.<sup>78</sup> Then he complies with her wishes and informs her about the content of the letter, but only to turn the situation to its opposite by requesting that she allow him to sleep with her. He laughs about the actual meaning of her name, Mätzli "Rüerenzumph" (Mätzli "Touch the Penis"), and explains that it metaphorically works well with his own male genital (2117–18). In fact, he openly talks about it: "Dein nam gehört wo zuo meinem stumpf" (2118; your name belongs to my thing).

Not certain about her willingness, he also threatens her with blackmail, as he holds the two letters and could make them public to her father, disgracing her thereby. At first Mätzli does not seem to understand what he really means, but she submits soon to his demands because he has exposed his penis and hypnotizes her to accept it as a deliriously sexual object, singing a kind of a nursery rhyme with strongly pornographic implications: "Er sängelt: 'Da, da, nüssli, da, / Mätzli! Sta, sta hägili sta! / Der stumphe daz sein wurtzen, / Ein langeu mit zwain kurtzen'" (2139–42; He produced a singsong: "Here, here little nut, Mätzli, rise and rise. The stump is a root, consisting of a long stick with two balls attached to it).<sup>79</sup> He

<sup>77</sup> Classen, *Verzweiflung und Hoffnung*.

<sup>78</sup> Zeyen, . . . *daz tet der liebe dorn*, 54–56.

<sup>79</sup> There is no doubt that this pedestrian translation does not do any justice to the vivacious wording in late-medieval German. For a similar case of a seemingly innocent nursery rhyme, which, however, also carries a clear sexual connotation, see Oswald von Wolkenstein's poem "Ir alten weib" (Kl. 21), *Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, ed. Karl Kurt Klein. 3rd, revised and expanded ed. Hans Moser, Norbert Richard Wolf, and Notburga Wolf. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek, 55

request her, as if he were a hypnotist, to keep quiet, not to protest, and to accept this metaphorical root (2146).

His strategy achieves the desired goal, of course, and she willingly submits to his demands, accepting his penis and hence his body, whatever the expression used by Wittenwiler might imply: "Da mit ward sei der wurtzen essen" (2151; then she swallowed his root). This gives her so much pleasure that she loses all her senses (2154), but she also demands more and refuses to allow him to withdraw and to stop at that moment. In fact, appealing to his professional skills as a doctor, she requests: "'Artzet mich en wenig me: / Ich derlaid es bas dan e'" (2157–58; "treat me medically a little more: I can cope with it better now). In fact, she turns aggressive and holds him at his testicles, forcing him to give her more: "'Der wurtzen wil ich aber haben'" (2163; "I want to have more of this root").<sup>80</sup>

Undoubtedly, considering the pornographic projection, this appealed to a male audience once again, though the narrative also implies male insecurities and fear of female sexuality since she is insatiable and demands ever more from him than what he can deliver, a common concept of female sexuality wide-spread in the Middle Ages and beyond: "Er mocht es laider nicht gefüegen, / Daz sei sich wölt des stumpfes gnüegen" (2169–70; Unfortunately, he could not meet this expectation and give her enough of his penis).<sup>81</sup> Instead, he must do it for a third time, which finally seems to satisfy her, but it also entirely exhausts him—a theme we can find in much of late-medieval erotic narratives.<sup>82</sup> The doctor finally curses

(Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1987), vv. 99–114. Oswald lived from ca. 1376/77 to 1445. I am currently preparing a complete translation of all of Oswald's songs into English (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

<sup>80</sup> This is a common theme in late-medieval erotic literature, regularly projecting male sexual fantasies about women's irrepressible and inexhaustible sexual desire, see Dicke, "Mären-Priapeia." For the problematic issues connected with such literary projections regarding women's lustfulness, see Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 13–19. The sexual innuendo is hardly veiled, if at all, and yet the erotic humor is still predicated on the metaphorical expression. For an excellent discussion of innuendo, see the contribution to this volume by Siegfried Christoph.

<sup>81</sup> This is beautifully illustrated by Lisa Perfetti in her analysis of Old French *fabliaux*, "The Lewd and the Ludic: Female Pleasure in the Fabliaux," *Comic Provocations: Exposing the Corpus of Old French Fabliaux*, ed. Holly A Crocker. Foreword by R. Howard Bloch. Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 17–31; here 27–28. She alerts us, particularly, to the danger of perceiving these at first sight 'pornographic' narratives only as such. "In reading through the lens of the clichés about feminine lasciviousness, we may often miss the pleasures that have more to do with the mind than the body, that focus more on wit and language than on sex, and take far more delight in the ludic than in the lewd" (28).

<sup>82</sup> See, for instance, the Middle High German *mären* "Der Sperber" (568–88), "Das Häslein" (590–616), *Novellistik des Mittelalters: Märendichtung*. For the English translation, now see *Erotic Tales from Medieval Germany*, selected and trans. Albrecht Classen (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007).

her and conjures the devil who would be the only one who could effectively control unchecked female sexuality (2178), again a common notion in the Middle Ages.

The critical issue, however, proves to be the readiness and carefree attitude with which the certainly learned author Heinrich Wittenwiler, a respected notary and lawyer in the city of Constance, incorporates open discussions of sexual activities, unabashedly describing the male genital and alleged female lustfulness. Certainly, he positions the episode in the world of the peasants, but his account, which also teems with references to learnedness, was certainly intended for a sophisticated audience. To argue that the late Middle Ages witnessed a growing form of shame and discipline, as Norbert Elias had suggested, cannot be confirmed by these literary examples insofar as they actually demonstrate the very opposite, that is, an increase in the public interest in sexuality and its open display in order to address issues of ethics, morality, love, and public honor.

Sexuality, if not graphic pornography, was obviously fully acceptable in the late-medieval literary discourse, and apparently served both for public entertainment and the critical examination of the gender discourse, of power structures, and also of the epistemological meaning of sexuality per se within the context of courtly and monastic institutions. Moreover, the unabashed display and discussion of sexual organs, both male and female, served the function to reflect upon the basic aspects of social order, the all-pervasive power of sexuality, the foundation of the human community, and the justification, if not legitimization, of some of the major church institutions, the convent, or the monastery.<sup>83</sup> None of the anonymous authors, and likewise none of the known creators of other *mæren*, indicated with their open reference to sexuality and the human body that for them the world had lost all meaning and had turned into anarchy, as some scholars have argued.<sup>84</sup> On

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<sup>83</sup> For an example of the impact of sexuality on monks, especially in their young years, see the most hilarious fourteenth-century *mære* "Das Gänlein" (The Little Goose), *Novellistik im Mittelalter*, 648–64.

<sup>84</sup> This is the thesis developed by Grubmüller, "Das Groteske im Mære," 52–53. He argues very much in line with Walter Haug's thesis regarding complete meaninglessness of those tales, "Entwurf zu einer Theorie der mittelalterlichen Kurzerzählung," *Kleinere Erzählformen des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*, 1–36. However, in specific opposition to both their viewpoints the thematization of sexuality I would submit that those narratives with even most violent content provide powerful literary messages about the basic structure and dimension of this world, and of human society. In other words, the sexual discourse provides good insight into the fundamentals of human existence and does not reflect meaningless grotesque perspectives. See my review in *Germanic Review and Notes* 23, 2 (1992): 82–84. Grubmüller expanded and confirmed his arguments in his *Die Ordnung, der Witz und das Chaos: Eine Geschichte der europäischen Novellistik im Mittelalter: Fabliau – Mære – Novelle* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006), 223–38 (for the "Nonnenturnier," see 232–33). However, it seems to amount to a considerable misreading of the metaphorical imagery contained in the "Nonnenturnier" to argue that the castration of the penis leads to a "perverse

the contrary, the open discussion of sexuality and its occasional transgression reconstituted, by evoking laughter and horror, shock and consternation, anger and fear, the communicative basis of all social interactions within a harmonious context. Certainly, wherever we turn, we observe elements of perversion and chaos, but the nuns' fascination with the penis and their wild tournament are not necessarily a reflection of men's deep-seated fear of female sexuality; instead their actions rather represent a critique of the ethical and moral norms imposed on people by the Church.<sup>85</sup> By the same token, the lady's criticism of the knight and her devastating rhetorical strategy to convince him that he would appeal to women only if he were a eunuch do not reflect her desire to subjugate men altogether.

Quite the opposite is the case, but the knight does not understand her metaphorical language and proves his utter foolishness, making himself the object of global contempt, which justifies his ostracism. The unabashed and explicit sexual humor in all of these narratives is not intended to destroy the social, ethical, or moral norms of their time. As our analysis has demonstrated, the frank, if not crude, discussion of sexuality and of the human genitals aims for the regrouping of a disjointed world and intends to bring men and women together again on the most basic level, their mutual sexual attraction.<sup>86</sup> Laughter is reserved for the

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Verdinglichung und Sakralisierung des Geschlechtstriebes" (232; perverse reification and sacralization of the sexual instinct). The castration opens the floodgates, as Grubmüller sees it, for the evil in this world and for absolute chaos (238). Certainly, violence follows suit, but the laughter created by the literary account also restrains the imminent chaos and anarchy. As an aside, Grubmüller also ignores the outcome of the nuns' tournament, when he claims: "An keiner Stelle ist davon die Rede, daß der *zägel* und irgendeine der Nonnen sich vereinigen" (237; Nowhere there is a mention that the penis and any of the nuns got together). Although the penis has been stolen, or secretly removed, all nuns have lost their veil and headgear, and they all show clear signs of having been raped, or at least of having had some kind of sexual experience, as the metaphorical language clearly indicates. At any way, one of the nuns has taken the penis away with her and enjoys it privately.

<sup>85</sup> von Bloh, "Heimliche Kämpfe," 236–37, goes so far as to talk of the "teuflische Potential der Frauen und ihren Mangel an Gehorsam" (devilish potential of women and their lack of obedience). This entirely ignores the knight's brutal abuse of women and the ladies' deep disappointment over his foolish act of castrating himself. Moreover, the lady knows very well how to defend herself and how to make the young man an utter fool who will ultimately be utterly ostracized and expelled from this world and society.

<sup>86</sup> Dicke, "Mären-Priapeia," 289, observes: "Das personalisierte, in Handlungen vorgeführte Genital beiderlei Geschlechts ist der wohl deutlichste motivliche Beleg eines historischen psychischen Bedarfs, die zivilisatorisch bedingte Dissoziation des Subjects im Imaginären zu bewältigen" (The personalized, through actions presented genital of both genders, is the probably clearest motivational evidence for the psychic need to overcome the dissociation of the subject, caused by the civilization process, in the imaginary). Despite the apparently forceful psychological reading, a sober analysis of the narrative points into a different direction, that is, toward a solid embrace of the fundamental value of sexuality between both genders.

audience, both about the knight's and the nuns' foolishness, but then also about the complexities of sexuality itself, and about the difficulties in coming to terms with the problematic gender relationship.<sup>87</sup>

Geoffrey Chaucer, in his *Canterbury Tales*, also turned to plain sexual matters and has his notorious Wife of Bath speak about them frankly in the Prologue to her *Tale*, which seems to be most appropriate for the conclusion of this study, especially since it confirms our findings from a comparative point of view:

Telle me also, to what conclusion  
Were membres maad of generacion,  
And of so parfit wys a wight ywroght?  
Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.  
Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and down,  
That they were maked for purgacioun  
Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale  
Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,  
And for noon oother cause,—say y no?  
The experience woot wel it is noght so.  
So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,  
I sey this, that they maked ben for bothe,  
This is to seye, for office, and for ese  
Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese,  
Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette  
That man shal yelde to his wyf hir dette?  
Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,  
If he ne used his sely instrument?  
Thanne were they maad upon a creature  
To purge uryne, and eek for engendrure.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Klaus Grubmüller, "Wer lacht im Märe—und wozu?," *Lachgemeinschaften: Kulturelle Inszenierungen und soziale Wirkungen von Gelächter im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Werner Röcke and Hans Rudolf Velten. Trends in Medieval Philology, 4 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2005), 111–22, argues from an opposite viewpoint, as already reflected in his previous studies, suggesting that this kind of verse narratives reflects grotesque, horrifying, anarchic elements. I find such arguments unconvincing, since laughter has always established community, even if at the cost of an outsider or members of minority groups. See, for instance, Albrecht Classen, "Der komische Held Till Eulenspiegel: Didaxe, Unterhaltung, Kritik," *Wirkendes Wort* 42, 1 (1992): 13–33.

<sup>88</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 115–33; I have discussed this open discussion of sexuality already in *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum frühen 17. Jahrhundert*. Volksliedstudien, 5 (Münster, New York, et al.: Waxmann, 2005), 73–107; the current scholarship on Chaucer's *Wife of Bath Prologue* and *Tale* is, of course, legion, see, for instance, S. H. Rigby, *Chaucer in Context*. Manchester Medieval Studies (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 137–51; Peter G. Beidler, *Geoffrey Chaucer: The Wife of Bath*. Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996). See also the contribution to this volume by Jean E. Jost.

In fact, although “Der turnei von dem zers” seems to border on the pornographic, if the narrative does not actually transgress the limits of decency (even within a medieval context), it powerfully contributed to the broad, at times rather deft, intensive, and complex discourse on love, marriage, sexuality, gender identity, and the body.<sup>89</sup> The literary evidence from the following decades, if not centuries, particularly the vast corpus of popular narratives, in which sexuality plays an extraordinarily important role, would require rewriting of many of the big theories regarding the process of civilization. It seems highly problematic now to subscribe any longer to the ideas proposed by Elias and by Duerr in this respect.

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<sup>89</sup> See my introduction and the various contributions to *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*.

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## The Prosecution of Sex in Late Medieval Troyes

One of the chief responsibilities of late medieval church officials was to regulate the sexual behavior of the Christian community, not only of the clergy but of the laity as well. Concerned with purity, morality, and above all the salvation of souls, church officials promulgated texts in all manners of legal, theological, and pastoral genres, identifying sexual offences and explaining how to regulate them.

To enforce these rules a bishop could make use of two institutions: first, his own and the archdeacon's "visitation" powers, which authorized the inspection of each parish of the diocese, and second, the court of his delegated judicial official, the so-called officiality court.<sup>1</sup> This study offers an analysis of sexual offences found in the surviving fifteenth-century records from the bishop's officiality court of the diocese of Troyes, in the Champagne region of northern France. After examining the legal and cultural setting of the fifteenth century, this study investigates what kinds of sexual offences the officiality court of Troyes did and did not prosecute, with some reference to how these practices did and did not correspond with other courts in other places.

Sexual offences had always received a great deal of attention from church leaders, Paul's epistles, the writings of the Fathers, and church councils records all offer important early examples, and their number and genre would develop considerably over time.<sup>2</sup> As also explained in the introduction to this collection, early medieval penitentials dating from the seventh century gave prominence to sexual offences, implying that sexual purity was an essential element in Christian morality.<sup>3</sup> The enormous value accorded these concerns was subsequently

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Fournier, *Les Officialités au moyen âge* (Paris: E. Plon et cie, 1880); Anne Lefebvre-Teillard, *Les officialités à la veille du Concile de Trente* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1973); Charles Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society in the Later Middle Ages: Arguments about Marriage in Five Courts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> James Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2–4; cf. also "2. Private Life in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," in Albrecht Classen's "Introduction" to the current volume.

<sup>3</sup> Brundage, *Law*, 174; cf. also "1. How to Justify the Cultural-Historical Research on Sexuality?" in Albrecht Classen's introduction to this volume.



reflected in Carolingian and other secular law collections.<sup>4</sup> Before the later Middle Ages, however, Church enforcement of these rules about how and with whom sexual relations should take place, seems to have been limited to the clergy if at all. With the development of officiality courts in the course of the thirteenth century, we begin to find evidence of a penalization of illegal sexual activity, still primarily involving clerics. But by the fifteenth century the extramarital sexual activity of more and more lay people was not only described as illegal, as in the past, but it was put under surveillance and actively prosecuted.

The growing concern of church officials with lay sexual behavior was only one aspect of a larger shift, as the Church paid increasing attention to lay conduct.<sup>5</sup> In particular, it is important to recognize that the Church's growing interest in regulating lay sexual conduct was linked to the Church's new focus on active regulation of the marital practices of all Christians. The later Middle Ages was a time when marriage received newly heightened acclamation within the Church. Marriage was viewed not only as a sacrament but as an institution related to the holy orders of ordained clergy: to marry was to enter into a kind of sacred lay order of matrimony. This had significant implications for the attitude of the Church toward sex, as sex within marriage became the recipient of increasingly high praise. As in the past, theologians and canonists praised marital sex for its function as the source of legitimate offspring. But more positive readings were also accorded other potential merits of marriage that had traditionally received more

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<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-800*. The Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985): 75-76.

<sup>5</sup> This new practice of prosecution, which took place in a context of widened scope of cases involving other offenses such as blasphemy, heresy, and failure to confess or receive Eucharist, took on a particular character because of several important developments in the legal theology. Beginning with Alexander III and especially Innocent III we can see an increase in efforts on the part of papal and other religious authorities to find ways to regulate the behavior of all members of the Christian community. Annual confession became a requirement for all Christians since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215; by the fifteenth century sources from officiality courts include cases of men and women fined by the official for failure to comply. Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, Canon 12 "*Omnis utriusque sexus*," see *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner. 2 Vols. (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:245; examples of cases involving failure to confess can be found in the *Archives Départementales de l'Aube* (hereafter AD Aube) G4173f2r, G4174f20r.

ambivalent treatment.<sup>6</sup> Preachers, especially when addressing a lay audience, extolled the virtues of marriage and a properly conducted married life.<sup>7</sup>

This new respect accorded sexually active marriage may have arrived due to a combination of concerns; theological, polemical, and pragmatic. As found with Augustine, when he confronted Manichean rejections of marriage, Church officials in the High Middle Ages similarly praised marriage against the efforts of heretics to denigrate it. Cathars, who regarded all sexual relations as a mortal sin, even if not especially within marriage and for the purpose of procreation, provoked a strong response from Pope Innocent III and other church leaders. Orthodox theologians had always given marriage some credit for its procreative and social value, and this view became increasingly positive as the Middle Ages wore on. But polemic was not the only source for this attitude. The elevation of marriage and sexual relations within it may have also arrived as a response to the population loss and disruptions of the famines, plagues, and warfare of the fourteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever the reasons, in the later Middle Ages, while numerous secular authors writing in the vernacular denigrated and satirized sex and marriage, church officials escalated their praise of the holy, sanctioned, and now fully sacramental union.<sup>9</sup> By the fifteenth century church officials made more of marriage than ever

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<sup>6</sup> Much of these goods of marriage are derived from and quote heavily the teachings of Augustine, but not even in Augustine's greatest praise of marriage, usually voiced in his strongest attacks on Manichean anti-matrimonial and sexual teachings, does he reach the heights of thirteenth-, fourteenth-, or especially fifteenth-century theologians. See Émile Schmitt, *Le Mariage Chrétien dans l'Oeuvre de Saint Augustin: une théologie baptismale de la vie conjugale* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1983), 68. See, more generally, Glenn Olsen, "Progeny, Faithfulness, Sacred Bond: Marriage in the Age of Augustine," *Christian Marriage*, ed. id. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001); and Willemien Otten, "Augustine on Marriage, Monasticism, and the Community of the Church," *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 385–405. On later medieval treatments of marital sex, see Pierre Payer, *The Bridling of Desire, Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages*. (Toronto and Buffalo, N.Y.: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Brundage, *Law*, 368, 449.

<sup>7</sup> On marriage sermons see David D'Avray, *Medieval Marriage Sermons: Mass Communication in a Culture Without Print* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); id., *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Albrecht Classen, *Der Liebes- und Ehediskurs vom hohen Mittelalter bis zum frühen 17. Jahrhundert*. *Volksliedstudien*, 5 (Münster, New York, Munich, and Berlin: Waxmann, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Also suggested by Ruth Karras in her *Sexuality in the Middle Ages: Doing Unto Others* (New York and London: Routledge Press, 2005), 68. Efforts to use marriage as source to increase population can also be found in Augustan legislation in the first century B.C.E. See Judith Evans-Grubbs, "Marrying and its Documentation in Later Roman Law," *To Have and to Hold: Marrying and its Documentation in Western Christendom, 400–1600*, ed. Philip L. Reynolds and John Witte (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43–94, 48–49.

<sup>9</sup> See Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*, ed. and trans. Armand Strubel (Paris: Livres de Poche 1990); and the anonymous *Quinze joies de mariage*, ed. and trans. Monique Satucci (Paris: Stock, 1986).

before, and in so doing also offered positive readings of procreative sex within marriage, according a more positive treatment to sex, and sexually active spouses.

We can see this shift at work in the cult of the saints. In earlier centuries saints, especially women, had generally been sexual ascetics. But the later Middle Ages saw the emergence of the cult of married and sexually active saints, who slept with their husbands for the purpose of procreation but otherwise abstained, such as Brigit of Sweden and Dorothy of Montau. While holy women such as Brigit still expressed anxiety that only virgins would be saved, they were on the whole reassured.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps for the first time since late antiquity, having consummated a marriage did not represent a barrier to holiness.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, as Dyan Elliott has argued, this new and heightened praise for marital copulation created a difficult environment for female mystics who would have preferred to avoid consummating their marriages.<sup>12</sup>

The new role of sanctified sexual active women received perhaps its strongest expression with the late medieval fervor over Saint Anne, Mary's mother and Jesus's grandmother. Anne, according to medieval tradition, had sex with all three of her husbands.<sup>13</sup> The desires of the flesh were still problematic to say the least, and committed virgins such as St. Charlotte of Corbie might scorn those who had sex with anyone, even their husbands. Yet even Charlotte received correction on this attitude in the form of a vision of Saint Anne surrounded by the holy progeny produced by her sexual activity.<sup>14</sup>

Divine instruction of this kind, also recounted in miracle stories and in sermons, offered a strong impetus to view procreative sex with more leniency and even reverence.

Thus, at about the same time as the church courts began to assert their jurisdiction over sacred things and people, a strain of theology developed that took Augustine's valorization of marriage, and gradually marital sex itself, to new

<sup>10</sup> Karras, *Sexuality*, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography*. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Dyan Elliott, "Bernardino of Siena Versus the Marriage Debt," *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler. British Library Studies in Medieval Culture (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 168–200; here 174; see also chapters 4 and 5 of Dyan Elliott's *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). See also the example of Margery Kempe. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Woodbridge; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> On Saint Anne, see *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society* ed. Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press: 1990), and Virginia Nixon, *Mary's Mother: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Europe* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press: 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Peter of Vaux, *Vita Sanctae Colettæ*. Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur, 62 vols. (Brussels, 1863–1925), March 1: 539–89.

heights. All of this escalated into making marriage a sacrament of the Church, and some of this sense of holiness eventually seeped into sexuality as well. While theologians and canonists continued to define illicit sexual activity as a mortal sin, they did not regard sex within marriage as sinful so long as it was engaged in for the purpose of having children, or to gratify sexual desire that might otherwise tempt a spouse to commit adultery. Church officials did not try to get rid of sex, but to regulate it, make it and its practitioners as holy as possible.

Officiality courts became an extremely important vehicle for this attempt at widespread regulation of sexuality. They did so, however, in competition with other courts. As most crimes were also sins a church court could claim some authority, but this theoretical claim to broad powers proved more complicated in practice. Each officiality court was charged, according to tradition, with the policing of offences involving clerics, morals, or sacraments, and offences committed in sacred spaces.<sup>15</sup> Illicit sexual behavior fell under all three of these categories. Nevertheless, it was widely held that church courts should act only when local custom permitted or in the absence of a functioning secular court, and bishops had to compete to claim authority over some cases.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, whatever claims a bishop may have made, his officiality court faced competition from a variety of fora, both ecclesiastical and secular. As a result, many types of illegal sexual behavior potentially escaped the bishop's jurisdiction. Secular courts and papal authority both claimed their own privileges in a complex and often overlapping web of justice that worked out with a great deal of variation and change over time. Tradition, social practice, and grasping authorities on all fronts led to a wide range of practices across regions and even among neighboring dioceses.

For example, as R. H. Helmholz explains, English royal claims to jurisdiction over serious crimes met with few successful ecclesiastical challenges.<sup>17</sup> Mia Korpiola has demonstrated that in Sweden the jurisdiction of sexual crime often had shifting boundaries.<sup>18</sup> In the course of the fourteenth century Swedish secular

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<sup>15</sup> Lefebvre-Teillard, *Officialites*, 90. The two great sources for canonical judicial procedure and competence are: William Durand, *Speculum Iudiciale* (Basel 1574 ; reprint Aalen: Scientia, 1975); and Tancred of Bologna, *Ordo iudiciarius*, ed. Friedrich Bergmann, in *Pilii, Tancredi, Gratie, Libri de iudiciorum ordine* (1842, repr. Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1965), 87–316.

<sup>16</sup> R. H. Helmholz, "Crime, Compurgation, and the Courts of the Medieval Church," *Law and History Review* 1,1 (1983): 1–26; here 4. Helmholz cites Henricus Boich, *Commentaria in Libros Decretalium*, X 5.34.6 (*Nos inter alios*) no. 9 (Venice, 1576), 222.

<sup>17</sup> Helmholz, "Crime," 8. Exceptions included assaults on clerics and violence that took place in sacred places. In addition, a variety of seemingly secular crimes committed by lay people appeared in some number in all English ecclesiastical court records. As Helmholz argues, the courts acted here in an effort to restore peace through providing a venue for mediation or compurgation, or a public declaration of innocence. See Helmholz, "Crime," 21.

<sup>18</sup> Mia Korpiola, "Rethinking Incest and Heinous Sexual Crime," *Boundaries of the Law: Geography*,

courts increasingly claimed the right to prosecute several sexual crimes, and with increasing severity.<sup>19</sup> As we will see, these more limited episcopal judicial capabilities in England and Sweden bear little resemblance to the incredible amount of adjudication and punishment of criminal activity in ecclesiastical courts of Northern France and the Low Countries, and perhaps other dioceses across western Christendom as well.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever his position vis-à-vis local or royal courts, a bishop faced jurisdictional challenges not only from secular authorities but also from other ecclesiastical authorities, above and below. While the bishop could condemn and punish many offences, some crimes were considered so serious that only the pope could offer absolution, such as the murder of a spouse. Coming up from below, grasping archdeacons might exceed what a bishop considered within their purview, and monasteries quite often won the right to have privileged status, with justice meted out within their own walls or by papal authority. In one example, the Paris archdeacon exercised his own competence over bigamy, condemning a man who had remarried while his first wife still lived to two years of prison and three days on the scaffold. It seems, however, that his bishop protested seriously the perceived usurpation of episcopal authority.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of all this competition, officiality courts in northern France and the Low Countries exercised a considerable amount of authority in the prosecution of sexual offences. Out of all of these courts, the sources for the officiality court of Troyes stand out for their record of a remarkable degree of activity. These sources reveal a newly widespread prosecution of sexual offences, seemingly reaching a far greater swath of the population than ever previously regulated or fined.<sup>22</sup>

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*Gender, and Jurisdiction in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Musson (Aldershot, Hants, England, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 102–17.

<sup>19</sup> Korpiola, "Rethinking," 113. The growing severity of punishment for sexual offences across western Christendom in the later middle ages took place in Sweden with some compensation for the Church, which was allowed to retain part of any fines levied for a sexual offence.

<sup>20</sup> While English officiality courts remain most frequently studied and familiar to modern scholars, followed by Northern France and the Low Countries, detailed studies on German and Italian officiality courts have recently been published or are in progress. See, for example, Christina Deutsch, *Ehegerichtsbarkeit im Bistum Regensburg*. Forschungen zur kirchlichen Rechtsgeschichte und zum Kirchenrecht, 29 (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag 2005), and look for forthcoming scholarship from Martine Charagat on Spain. See also *Matrimoni in dubbio. Unioni controverse e nozze clandestine in Italia dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, ed. Silvia Seidel Menchi and Diego Quagliani. Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento, Quaderni 57 (Bologna: Il mulino, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> See Léon Pommeray, *L'officialité archidiaconale de Paris aux xve-xvie siècles* (Paris: Sirey, 1933), 356–57.

<sup>22</sup> While a lack of sources predating the fourteenth and often fifteenth centuries may explain the apparent lack of earlier prosecution of sexual and other offences by officiality or other church courts, the growth of the courts themselves and the professionalization and legal training of an increasing number of bodies to staff such courts is certainly a thirteenth and fourteenth century

The surviving sources for this court's activities during the later Middle Ages is housed today in the departmental archives of the Aube, covering much of southern Champagne and based in the city of Troyes. We have many early charters, papal bulls, a series of inquests concerning privileges, one register from 1390, two fifteenth century registers designated by the notary as sentence registers, thirty case registers covering the second half of the fifteenth century, and a handful of registers of fines collected by the officiality court.<sup>23</sup>

The register describing fines paid to the officiality court plays an extremely important role in the reconstruction of the court's prosecution of sexual offences. One might expect excommunication to be the principal tool of an ecclesiastical institution. However, this court and most others like it seem to have preferred simply to threaten excommunication, while rarely following through for a case involving a sexual offence.<sup>24</sup> For sexual offences and crimes such as defamation or wife beating, we generally see the court acting not to excommunicate but to levy a fine.

The fines for sexual offences varied a great deal, ranging from a pound of wax or a few *sous* to two gold pieces. Penalties of 10 *livres tournois*, or about 5 gold pieces, were often threatened but never actually levied for a sexual offence. Once assigned, fines were often also further reduced or accompanied by a payment in a sum of wax, most often one pound, roughly the equivalent of six *deniers*.<sup>25</sup> Reductions of fines seems to have taken place in a majority of cases and some evidence of this can be found in the case register itself, where the initial fine and any reduction is noted.<sup>26</sup> It seems a good number of these fines were paid, and promptly, but most often it is quite difficult to know if any payment was made.

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innovation. See James Brundage, *The Profession and Practice of Medieval Canon Law*. Variorum Collected Studies (Aldershot, Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> The inventories for this collection offer a wealth of information, if often favoring the more spectacular and exceptional events in the officiality court's history. They offer an outstanding introduction to the medieval holdings of the departmental archive. *Inventaire sommaire des Archives départementales antérieures à 1790. Aube. Archives ecclésiastiques, série G*. 1 ed. M. D'Arbois de Jubainville; 2 eds. H. D'Arbois de Jubainville et F. André; 3 eds. F. André, J.-J. Vernier, and P. Piétrisson de Saint-Aubin (Troyes: vol. 1 Duféy-Robert, Vol. 2 L. Lacroix, vol. 3 A. Albert, 1873–1930).

<sup>24</sup> This was also the case in the neighboring diocese of Chalons-sur-Marne (modern Chalons-en-Champagne), see Veronique Beaulande, *Le Malheur d'Etre Exclu? Excommunication reconciliation et société à la fin du Moyen Age*. Histoire ancienne et médiévale, 84 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> For the fifteenth century in Troyes the currency is recorded in *livres tournois*, Tours mintage. 1 ecu = 2 livres = 40 sous; 1 sou = 12 deniers. See Peter Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange*. Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks, no. 13 (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1986), 172–73, 179.

<sup>26</sup> AD Aube G4173f35v. A priest confessed to keeping a concubine and received a written warning. His fine is described as follows: *taxatus unum scutum auri reductis ad xx soldi*.

With that said, let us turn to the details of the prosecution of sexual offences in the diocese of Troyes. In many ways, what is most surprising is what the court did not prosecute. The canonical and theological literature addressing sex quite often included a gradation of offences, the worst kind of sex done by the people who committed the worst sin in so doing, or by the worst combination of people, or person and animal. In many penitential constructions, sodomy, or bestiality, ranked as the worst offence, followed by sex with one's daughter or mother, sex with a nun, sex with a married woman, sex with a virgin, and finally sex with a consenting and unmarried woman.<sup>27</sup> By this logic, the greater the crime the heavier the penalty should be. Yet any evidence of this typology is absent from the Troyes officiality records, and some of the theoretically most egregious offenders do not appear in the records at all.

For example, practices such as bestiality, homosexual relations, masturbation, and sex between men and women at forbidden times or in forbidden positions, almost never appear. In particular, accusations of "crimes against nature" such as homosexual sex and bestiality don't appear in any officiality records I have seen, apart from one spectacular sodomy case tried by Jacques Fournier, of *Montaillou* fame, which involved the prosecution of a cleric accused of heresy and sodomy.<sup>28</sup> It seems that this virtual lack of prosecution of bestiality and sodomy holds for all officiality courts.

The same pattern can be seen in an analysis of the fines levied by the Troyes officiality court, which follow a loose taxonomy at best. Certainly the tariffs do not come close to the clear models proscribed in early penitentials. Indeed, the fines do not demonstrate many clear differentiations at all.<sup>29</sup> As we will see, a man who slept with a nun received the same fine as a man who slept with a married woman or widow. Repeat offences resulted in higher penalties, as did being a higher status

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<sup>27</sup> This type of categorization can be found for example in the mid-fourteenth century *Summa Praedicatorum* of John de Bromyard, of which several manuscripts and early printed editions have survived. For example, the Beinecke Library at Yale University has a late fifteenth- and early seventeenth-century edition: *Summa praedicatorum* (Basel: fs16 Johann Amerbach, not after 1484, Zi +7615; *Summa praedicatorum omnibus Dominici gregis*. . . (Antwerp: Ex officina Hieronymi Verdussi, 1614), 1742 Yale Library 14.1.4. For other typologies, see Brundage, *Law*, 168, and especially table 4.3 in his appendix. See also more generally, Pierre Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: the Development of a Sexual Code, 550-1150* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1984); Pierre Michaud-Quantin, *Somme de casuistique et manuels de confession au moyen âge (XII–XVI siècles)*. *Analecta mediaevalia Namurcensia*, 13 (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1962).

<sup>28</sup> *Le Registre d'Inquisition de Jacques Fournier, 1318–1325*, ed. Jean Duvernoy. 3 Vols. Bibliothèque Méridionale Publiée sous les Auspices de la Faculté des Lettres de Toulouse, XLI (Toulouse: Ed. Privat, 1965), Vol. 3:14–62. Arnauldus de Vedelhaco was sentenced to degradation and perpetual prison without remission in 1324.

<sup>29</sup> This lack of consistency is due in some part to the arbitrary assignments left to the judge's discretion, who was meant to take into account the wealth and status of the offender, and also any extenuating circumstances.

person with more income, but not always or in every case. The best that can be offered for taxonomy of crime is that the court judged most harshly sexual offences that involved perjury or recidivism. These cases might include a prison sentence, as did a number of adultery cases, especially those involving clergy.

Why do we not see a more consistent pattern of prosecution of acts treated as sexual offences in Christian literature? Why do some offences seem to escape episcopal correction? The lacunae in the records may be explained in part by the jurisdictional conflicts described above. Also, certain groups such as nuns and nobility, seem to have been exempt from the bishop's jurisdiction; certainly they rarely if ever turn up in the sources. Sodomy, at least, seems to have been prosecuted mainly if at all by secular courts, as in Florence or Venice and in the diocese of Tournai. As Marc Boone explains, while sodomy prosecutions took place on a markedly large scale in Ghent, against men and women, few such cases appear in ecclesiastical records: "Though nearly all sources qualify sodomy as sin, the role of ecclesiastical courts, otherwise very active in the field of adultery and other sexual offences related to marriage, is limited in these cases. The accounts of the bishop of Tournai's judges, the Official, between 1429 and 1481, offer only two examples of accusations of sodomy, and both of the accused seemed to have been members of the clergy."<sup>30</sup>

Other lacunae seem to have arrived as a result of spheres of competence within the Church, or canonical treatments of certain sexual behaviors. Prosecution for having sex in an inappropriate position, at a forbidden time of year, or in a forbidden place, does not appear in the officiality records from Troyes. Nor does any condemnation for paying or receiving payment for sex, or more specifically having sexual relations with a prostitute. Prostitutes and panderers do not frequent the records of the officiality court of Troyes. The professional herself was not fined by this court for practicing her trade, in keeping with the legal practices of the time. The sale of sex, while offensive for involving extramarital sexual relations, was not in and of itself a crime.<sup>31</sup> The acts of fornication, adultery, and

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<sup>30</sup> Marc Boone, "State power and illicit sexuality: the persecution of sodomy in late medieval Bruges," *Journal of Medieval History* 22, 2 (1996): 135–53; here 141–42. According to Boone, fifteenth-century Ghent saw eight executions for sodomy. This number included 3 women. See Boone, 142 note 24: "One of these cases concerned Bruges, the other one Ghent: Monique Vleeschouwers-Van Melkebeek, *Compotus sigilliferi curie Tornacensis. Rekeningen van de officialiteit van Doornik. Eerste deel: 1429–1481* (Brussels: Royal Commission of History, 1995), II, no. 8369: Dominus Adrianus De Clerc, presbiter, pro nunnulis contactibus vilibus et inhonestis cum quodam Cornelio ex post pro crimine sodomitico Brugis combusto, tempore adolescentie ipsi domini Adriani commissis, et passis, condemnatus (. . . ) ad viagium Beati Jacobi de Compostella."

<sup>31</sup> For medieval theologians' views on prostitution see James Brundage, *Law*, 211–12, 248, 249, 309, 342, 390–93. See also Ruth Mazo Karras, "Prostitution in Medieval Europe," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. Garland Reference Library of the



rape were illegal; prostitution itself, however dishonorable and steeped in sin, was not, or one should add, not yet.<sup>32</sup>

A handful of women described as prostitutes do appear in the Troyes officiality records, but they are never condemned for practicing their profession. For example, a group of witnesses offering testimony in the records of the officiality court of Troyes are identified as prostitutes, and there seems to have been some effort to discredit them in light of their status, but we do not know if the attempt was successful.<sup>33</sup> In any case, they appear as witnesses, not defendants. According to general standards for acceptable witness testimony the source should have much better standing in the community than a public prostitute could have mustered, but exceptions were often made for matrimonial disputes, and it was in this context that the prostitutes' evidence was taken.<sup>34</sup>

In another case where a prostitute is mentioned, a priest promised to stay away from a woman identified as a *meretricem publicem*, but the court offers no condemnation of her status as such.<sup>35</sup> Caught out at fornication or adultery, prostitutes would have received the same citations and fines as other members of their community, but we find no evidence of their being targeted or receiving harsher punishment than any other offender. In sum, the Troyes court did not prosecute prostitution. Out of all of the thousands of fifteenth-century cases that survive for the Troyes officiality court, sexual and non-sexual, there is only one case involving a prostitute faced with the threat of a fine if she does not give up her place in the brothel. The official orders her to quit the brothel not because all women must do so, but because she was engaged.<sup>36</sup>

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Humanities, 1696 (New York: Garland, 1996), 243–60; here 245–46.

<sup>32</sup> Leah Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc*. Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

<sup>33</sup> AD Aube G4175f36r. Jovis post Crucem (Thursday 4 May 1458). Item predictus Manchim le Jon. Felasot excipiendo contra testes proposuit quod fides non est adhibenda testibus pro parte promotoris contra reum quia sunt omnes fitiones infames filie lupanari meretrices publicae et tales erant ipse sue depositionis. Promotor negavit.

<sup>34</sup> The rules for acceptable witness testimony are complicated at best, but were intended at the very least to exclude members of the community whose status and reputation was suspect; as would have been the case with prostitutes. Acceptability of women's testimony was a complicated enough matter, though they seem to have acted as witnesses with great frequency in officiality courts. See James Brundage, "Juridical Space: Female Witnesses in Canon Law," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 147–56.

<sup>35</sup> AD Aube G4171f58v. Johannes Bathine clericus Cameracensis [Cambrai] diocesis, assecuravit de se et suis Alisonnam d'Oisy, publicam meretricem, alias La Picarde de villa de Lavoit, oriundam dicte Cameracensis diocesis, secundum usum et consuetudinem curie Trecensis ect.

<sup>36</sup> G4171f84v. Lune post Cantate. (Monday 27 May 1454). Dominus officialis monuit in scriptis et inhibit Johannetam filiam Johannes Francisti affidatam Johannis Rousey custinaris cum quo consumaverit ne de cetero sit in lupanari sub excommunicationis et aliis penis iuris.

If not bestiality, sodomy, or having sex in an inappropriate manner, what *did* the officiality court of Troyes prosecute? The sexual offences that did receive attention from the officiality court involved none of these acts. Instead, the court concerned itself with forbidden unions of heterosexual partners. The officiality court prosecuted not *how* parishioners had sex, but *with whom*.

This does not mean that the Church as a whole took no active interest in the details of sexual behavior. It may mean only that having sex in the wrong way, in the wrong position, at the wrong time, or not with a member of the opposite sex, was addressed in the confessional, not the officiality court. Certainly confession manuals nearly always included long lists of the many ways, times, and places that having sex might risk salvation.<sup>37</sup> While it is impossible to know what may have transpired in the confessional, having sex in an illegal way could thus have been rectified with an absolution granted in private by the confessor or bishop. But court prosecutions for their part showed no such interest in particular sexual practices. The officiality court of Troyes was concerned, not with what particular sex acts parishioners performed, but with the regulation of men and women who should not have been performing sex acts with each other in any case. This prosecution seems above all intended to punish offences against marriage. Thus court officials in Troyes prosecuted, for example, adultery.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, they summoned several thousand men and women over the course of the fifteenth century as part of inquiries initiated to ensure that they did not participate in adulterous or otherwise illegal unions. We should note that the prosecution of adultery cases instigated in Troyes often fell to secular jurisdiction in other places.<sup>39</sup> For example, in Venice secular magistrates had competence over adultery and other marital crimes: the *Avogaria di Comun* with the *Quarantia*

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<sup>37</sup> See for example the sections titled “*de luxuria*” in: *Thomas de Chobham: Summa Confessorum* ed. F. Broomfield. *Analecta mediaevalia Namurcensia*, 25 (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1968); *Robert of Flamborough: Liber Poenitentialis* ed. J. J. Firth (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies 1971); Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa sancti Raymundi de Peniafort . . . de poenitentia et matrimonio cum glossis Iohannis de Friburgo* [i.e., William of Rennes] (Rome, 1603 reprint, England: Gregg Press Ltd., 1967). Brundage, *Law*, 162, offers a great flow chart of the “sexual decision-making process according to the penitentials. For an online copy, see: <http://www.gened.arizona.edu/aclassen/Classen.pdf> (last accessed on March 31, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> For example, the cases of two married women accused of adultery in 1453, who later that year each paid a fine of twenty *sous*: G4171f82r. Jovis ante Cathedre (Thursday 15 Februrary 1453). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Marionnam uxorem Aubrici de Massy nec de cetero frequentet in scandalum cum Apdoto le spinglier sub excommunicationis et aliis penis iuris. Veneris post Cathedre (Friday 23 Februrary 1453). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Guillemetta uxorem Hugues Colet de Burgundia textoris pannorum ne de cetero frenquentet in scandalum cum Huguens Quares ~~cardatis~~ [crossed out in original] lannaris sub excommunicationis et aliis penis iuris. G 247 (1453): Marionna uxoris Aubrici de Masy xx soldi tournensis; Guillemta uxoris H Colet textorem pannorum xx soldi tournensis.

<sup>39</sup> Lefebvre-Teillard, *Officialites*, 118.

*Criminale* for the crimes of adultery, bigamy, and premarital sex, and the *Giudici del Procurator* determined the maintenance for a separated wife, but did not declare the separation, as that fell under ecclesiastical jurisdiction.<sup>40</sup> In Troyes, the bishop's official asserted jurisdiction over these and many other aspects of Christian sexual practice.

The officiality court also prosecuted another kind of adultery: sexual relations with nuns, the brides of Christ. Here, however, the court's activity was limited. One might expect that nuns, like their sexual opposites the prostitutes, might receive special attention from the court because of the great value their chastity had for the community. Nuns do appear in the officiality records alongside errant monks and friars, but their numbers are strikingly underrepresented for the diocese of Troyes.

Indeed, out of the 859 cases alleging sexual offences in the fifteenth century sentence register analyzed in this paper, only five nuns appear. Further, only three of these nuns are named as subject of the citation and liable for any fines the court assigned. While it seems extremely likely that the convents of the diocese had exempt status, this does not explain why more nuns did not appear at least as the object of illegal sexual attention. Here again, what is most striking about our records is what is missing.

At any rate, where nuns do appear, we find the court concerned, as always, with regulation of not how sex is performed but with whom. Our first case, from 1441, alleges that a Dominican, the prior of St. Bernard in Troyes, held in concubinage in his priory a nun of Troyes, one Sister Agnes. The prior confesses, and in a subsequent entry both are warned on pain of excommunication and unspecified judicial penalties to separate within nine days.<sup>41</sup> This case offers an example of a typical entry for concubinage, the only exceptional elements are the presence of the nun and a challenge to the bishop's right to prosecute the couple. Judicial

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<sup>40</sup> Cecilia Cristellon. "Charitas versus eros: Il matrimonio, la Chiesa e i suoi giudici nella Venezia del Rinascimento (1420–1545)," Ph.D. Dissertation in History and Civilization, European University Institute, Florence, Italy, 2005, 3. In Marseille a civil court exercised further jurisdiction over separations. In a case studied by Susan McDonough, a woman sued for restitution of her dowry and a separation in a secular court, the palace court of first instance. See Susan McDonough, "Judging Your Neighbor: Litigants' Strategies and the Importance of Witness Narratives in Medieval Marseille, 1400–1430," Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 2005, 138–75.

<sup>41</sup> G4171f30v. Die veneris post Remigis et Hilarii (Friday 20 January, 1441). Dominus officialis per suam iudicialiter appunctuavit quod frater Gerricus de Flumine prior Sancto Bernard Trecensis qui citatus erat ex officio, eo quod tenebat in suo prioratis in concubinato ut dicebatur sororem Agnetem religiosam dicti loci non obstante quod diceret se esse exemptum a quo appunctuavit non appellans sed eidem acquievit de dicto casu cum juramento . . . G4171f31r. Martis post festum Beati Vincensi (Tuesday 24 January, 1441). Item anno et die praedictos. Dominus officialis monuit in scriptis praedictos priorem et sororem Agnetem ne de cetero similiter frequentaverunt in loco suspecto sub excommunicationis et aliis penis iuris infra nonem dies quorum et pro primo tres pro secundo et reliquos tres pro termino et peremptorio . . .

penalties usually meant a financial penalty, but as the officiality court's collection register for the 1440s has not survived, we have no way of knowing if either the nun or friar paid any fine.

The second case is similar. In 1449 on the Saturday before the feast of Saint Bartholomew the official gave out a written warning to Friar Stephan Bonnat, prior of Vaudes, not to frequent and consort with an unnamed abbess of Bricot-les-Nonnains, as they were causing a scandal.<sup>42</sup> The friar was threatened with excommunication and a fine of ten *livre tournois*.<sup>43</sup> Ten *livres* represented a serious penalty, intended as a deterrent, but much more a threat than a sum anyone might actually be expected to pay. If any fine was in fact levied in the course of Stephan's dealing with the officiality court, it certainly would have been reduced considerably, and possibly never paid.<sup>44</sup>

The unnamed abbess herself appeared before the court on the Thursday after the feast of St. Remegius, or forty days later, and any illegal relations with Stephan do not constitute the bulk of the charges levied against her. Sister Johanna de la Heuse, abbess of Bricot-les-Nonnains, received a written warning not to consort scandalously with Friar Stephan Bonnot, and also with Denisot Esglanitur of Mazo Sancti Yspania, on penalty of excommunication and 100 *sous*.<sup>45</sup>

Our abbess does not pay any fines that we know of, and neither did the friar or the Spaniard, but Johanna had not seen the last of the official, as she was summoned again in 1458. This time her suspected partner was the priest Nicolas Vindey. They were warned to stay away from each other on pain of excommunication, ten *livres*, and other judicial penalties.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Valle Dei is most likely Vaudes.

<sup>43</sup> G4171f68v. Sabbati ante Bartholomei (Saturday 23 August 1449). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis fratrem Stephanam Bonnat priorem de Valle Dei ne de cetero frequentet et conversetur cum abbesse de Bricolio cum qua conversatus est in scandalum sub penis excommunicationis et x livre tournensis.

<sup>44</sup> As explained above, no sex offender ever seems to have paid such a large sum for any offence judged in the Troyes officiality court. This threatened penalty appeared with great frequency, and cannot be read as a particular response to sleeping with a nun in particular, as relations with both married women and single girls met with roughly the same response from the official. Fines levied for sexual infractions varied enormously, and we can gain no sense of a heavier fine on the basis of involvement with a nun than with any other woman, even an abbess.

<sup>45</sup> G4171f69r. Veneris post Remegium (Thursday 2 October 1449). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis sororem Johannetam de la Hense abbessecam de Bricolio ne de cetero conversetur in scandalum cum fratro Stephano Bonnot prioris de Valledai nec etiam cum Deniseto Esglanitur de Mazo Sancti Yspani sub penis excommunicationis et centum soldi.

<sup>46</sup> G4171f104v. Mercuris post Cantate (Wednesday 10 May 1458). Dominus officialis monuit in scriptis dominum Nicolaum Vindey presbiterium et sororem Johannam de la Hense abbessecam de Bricolio ne simul conversantur praesumeravit sub penis excommunicationis decem librum et aliis penis iuris.

What to make of all of these alleged relationships? Unfortunately we have no accompanying testimony or other sources that might aid in our evaluation of any truth to the accusations. Certainly the abbess may have been the subject of a series of false accusations, a program of defamation.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, even nuns strayed, and the literary tradition speaks volumes. The legal warnings given to our abbess here bring to mind another abbess: Madonna Usimbalda of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Summoned in the middle of the night to deal with a nun caught in bed with a man, the abbess reached for her wimple but mistakenly put her lover's breeches on her head as she rushed to condemn the errant sister.<sup>48</sup>

A fourth case involving a nun concerns a warning made in April of 1453 to Jean Dufour, a barber, that he no longer visit scandalously the convent of Notre-Dame aux Nonnains, and especially Sister Marie de Bonsen, a nurse, unless he had a manifest and rational cause to do so, on pain of excommunication and other judicial penalties.<sup>49</sup> Sister Marie receives another mention on the following page in the register, noted down on the Tuesday after Rogation, or roughly a month later, when Jean Coquale, a second barber, is told not to visit her scandalously at the convent unless with a manifest and rational cause, with the same penalties.<sup>50</sup> The convent of Notre-Dame Aux Nonnains, traditionally the most powerful and exempt of the convents in the region, may have preserved enough of its status into the fifteenth century to reserve the right to punish its own nuns for sexual offences, which would explain why Sister Marie did not appear before the officiality court.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> On the use of (false) accusation in courts as part of a larger process of vendetta or feud see the work of Daniel Lord Smail, especially *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264–1423*. *Conjunction of Religion and Culture in the Medieval Past* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Boccaccio's *Decameron*, transl. Guido Waldman. *The World's Classics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Ninth Day, Novel 2., 560–62

<sup>49</sup> G4171f78v. Lune post Quasimodo (Monday 9 April 1453). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Johannem Dufour barberis ne de cetero frequentet in scandalum in monasterium Beate Marie ad Moniales et maxime cum sorore Maria de Bonsey infirmaria dicti monasterii nisi pro manifesta et rationabili causa sub excommunicationis et aliis penis iuris.

<sup>50</sup> G4171f79r. Martis post Vocem Jocunditatis (Tuesday 15 May 1453). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Johannem Coquile barberis ne de cetero frequentet in scandalum cum sorore Maria de Bonsey infirmaria monasterii Beati Marie ad Moniales trecentis, neque in dicto monasterium nisi pro manifesta et rationali causa sub excommunicationis et aliis penis iuris.

<sup>51</sup> *Abbayes et prieurés de l'ancienne France: recueil historique des archevêchés, évêchés, abbayes et prieurés de France* (<http://www.monasticmatrix.org/bibliographia/?function=detail&id=1332>), vol. 6, 146–47; *Gallia Christiana* (<http://www.monasticmatrix.org/bibliographia/?function=detail&id=1186>), vol. 12, 563ff. (both last accessed on March 31, 2008). For some of the more memorable examples of the activities of the convent during its earlier heights of power see Theodore Evergates, *Feudal Society in Medieval France: Documents from the County of Champagne*. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) for some of the more memorable examples of the activities of the convent in its earlier heights of power.

In the fifth and final case involving a nun, in 1466, Jean Garre, the parish priest of Verrières, is warned on penalty of excommunication and 10 *livres* not to consort or be seen in a suspicious place with Sister Isabelle de Rochetaille, a nun of Notre-Dame aux Nonnains in Troyes, concerning whom he was denounced.<sup>52</sup>

It is important to emphasize that our five nuns belonged to what must have still been a sizable population of cloistered women despite the apparent losses of the fourteenth century, particularly in Cistercian houses.<sup>53</sup> That only five of them appear in our records can only mean that there was a lack of emphasis on the policing of sexual activity involving monastic women by the officiality court. The same can perhaps be said of male monastics, as only twelve monks appear in the register, not so far from the nuns' five. Due to jurisdictional questions or acting within other spheres of influence or interest, the officiality court focused its energy on the world outside the cloister.

The earlier sections of this article focused on the kinds of sexual offence and offenders that were not actively regulated by the officiality court of Troyes. In what follows I will turn to those behaviors and people the court did police, and in two ways. First, I will provide a statistical analysis of the cases involving sexual offences that were included in the first and largest sentence register to survive from the diocese of Troyes. In the second section I will offer a broader, more qualitative analysis treating a handful of cases in depth and drawing on sentence registers, cases registers, and records of fines collected by the officiality to provide more complete case histories.

A statistical analysis of the 1600 cases recorded in the earliest surviving *troyenne* sentence register including entries made between 1420 and 1470 can be broken down into three main categories of cases; assecurations, warnings, and sentences. 527 of these cases are assecurations. They involve an agreement or promise not to rob, molest, or in any way mistreat an individual, their goods, or their family, on penalty of a heavy fine. We usually do not know why these agreements were

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<sup>52</sup> G4171f145r. Veneris ante festum Beati Barnabe apostoli (Thursday 12 June 1466). Dominus officialis monuit in scriptis dominum Johannem Garre presbiterium curitum ecclesie parrochie de Verrerise (Verrières) sub penis excommunicationis et decem librum tournensis ne de cetero conversari praesumat in scandalum ~~in concubinato~~ [crossed out in original] nec in loco suspecto cum sororem Isabella de Rochetaille de qua ~~su~~ [crossed out in original] religiosu dotus monasterii beate Marie ad Moniales cum de qua fuit diffamatis. This is one of only a handful of cases in the sentence register that makes overt mention of a denunciation. As is almost always the case, the identity of the denunciator is not included in the case, and following denunciatory procedure was probably concealed from the suspect as well.

<sup>53</sup> Anne Lester, "Gender and Social Networks in Medieval France: The Convents of the County of Champagne," Ph. D thesis, Princeton University, November 2003.

made, but occasionally one can trace connections to other entries in this and other registers.<sup>54</sup>

Two hundred of the cases are sentences for condemned and confessed offenders, their crimes range from homicide to theft of sacred objects to heresy. Twenty-seven of these sentences involve a marital or sexual offence, and these cases involve the most serious penalties that the officiality court meted out, both in fines and imprisonment. No single sexual offence was serious enough of a crime to merit a formal sentence; the sexual misbehavior is worsened by perjury or in one case by a physical attack on a court official by an angry, unrepentant adulterer.<sup>55</sup>

The largest single group of cases encompasses the 854 monitions and inhibitions, of which 251 are inhibitions. These closely related cases include accusations of blasphemy, defamation, violence, and sexual offences. In this type of case, of which we have already seen several examples with the cases involving nuns described above, an alleged offender appears before the court official to receive a written warning, usually accompanied by threats of excommunication and a fine, but in more serious or repeat offences, suspension, deprivation of a benefice, or imprisonment. The sexual offences addressed here include the often overlapping categories of fornication, adultery, premarital sex, defloration, and concubinage.

The total number of sexual offences found in the register, both warnings and sentences, is 859 cases. The vast majority are, as we have seen, warnings to stop a behavior identified as suspect. The couple or individual accused of a sexual offence is ordered not to be seen alone or in any suspect places with the other person or persons. If the allegation included suspicion of concubinage or cohabitation, the accused are ordered to stop living together within a certain period of time.

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<sup>54</sup> G4171f128v. Here we see a standard monition, followed immediately by a promise by Nicolai Foret, one of the suspected offenders, not to harm in any way a woman who, it can be assumed, might have had something to do with his being denounced for keeping a concubine: *Martis post Remegium* (Tuesday 4 October 1463). *Dominus officialis monuit in scriptis Jaquetta filiam Michaelis Regnault ut judicialiter recedat de consorcio Nicolai Foret sui concubinarii ad penam x livre et excommunicationis. Nicolaus Foret clericus assecuravit de se et suis de bono et legitimo assecuravit secundum usum curie Trecensis Reginaldam uxorem Guillelli de Nagier barbier et tonsi.*

<sup>55</sup> G4171f54r–56r. Gilet Simon, a married man, had been involved with a widow called Isabelle for five or six years despite frequent remonstrance from the official. Gilet responded with curses and threatened many times to kill the official. One day, irritated at Isabelle's failure to make a rendezvous, which he learned from a neighbor had been due to her own distress over the official's warnings of eternal damnation, Gilet sought out a court official, who he found walking through Troyes, and attacked him. The bishop excommunicated and imprisoned Gilet, condemning him to a years penance in prison on bread and water, and ordering him to seek absolution from the pope.

Out of these 859 sexual offences, 523 involved men identified as clerics, either as subject or object of the citation. 336 involved laymen, though it is possible that some of them were clerics, as the designation was occasionally omitted.<sup>56</sup> Needless to say, in all of these cases, at least one woman was also involved.

Women are described only as daughters, wives, widows, or nuns. A daughter might be assumed to be younger or unmarried, but this was not always the case. One Isabelle of Troyes appeared in the records first as a widow and only later as a daughter, when the status of her first husband was unclear.<sup>57</sup> Occasionally the women are also identified as a housekeeper, or the former housekeeper of an employer, or as a concubine.<sup>58</sup> Out of the 486 women involved in sexual offences 270 were identified as wives and 122 as widows. This certainly suggests that a significant number of women in the diocese married at least once, but can't be taken as indicative of the general population of the diocese, as it does not account for the nuns and other women who may have been exempt from the jurisdiction. It does suggest that wives were no more or less likely than other women to be accused of a sexual offence.

For our clerics we have some information about their titles and professions in a number of cases. 148 clerics have the title *dominus* and 9 *magister*; these men were only counted as clerics if they also had some other clearly clerical title, such as priest or friar. Priests appear most often at 166 times. 69 friars, 68 curates, 61 chaplains, 57 priors, 16 vicars, and 12 monks finished out the group. Professions for both clerics and laymen included barber-surgeons, tailors, paper-makers, weavers, barrel makers, carpenters, cooks, mercers, merchants, tanners, and servants.

One would like to know who the main target, or targets, of these prosecutorial efforts were. Were illegal relationships with clergy more actively prosecuted than illegal relationships among lay people? Were men, lay or cleric, more often the subject of a citation than women? Examining who came before the officiality court to receive a warning or sentence offers some indication, but incompletely. While this information does reveal the names and offences of those who appeared before the official, we have no surviving records for Troyes listing suspects who did not answer summons.

Drawing, then, on what incomplete records we have, we see that 310 women, 238 clerics, and 135 lay men all answered summons. So, while laywomen predominate out of the three groups, with men treated together regardless of

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<sup>56</sup> G4171f128v,129r. Nicolai Foret, described in note 51 above, is only designated as cleric in the second entry.

<sup>57</sup> G4173f165r. "Isabelle relicta defuncti Symoni Vautier..." and G4174f10r "filia defuncti magister Guidonis Henneguin . . ."

<sup>58</sup> The word I am translating as housekeeper is "*pedisseca*."



clerical status, out of these 683 cases, men appear slightly more often than women, 373 to the women's 310. In the remaining 176 of the 859 total cases, the male and female suspects appeared together. I find this evidence on the whole inconclusive.

The surviving sources for the officiality court of Troyes provide a more satisfying answer to the question of which illegal sexual behaviors, those involving clergy or those between laymen and women, received more attention from the court. 330 cases involved laity only, and 529 cases involved clergy or nuns. These numbers suggest, therefore, a more general effort to prosecute sexual offences involving clergy.

We have learned something of who those suspected of sexual offences were, now let us see what we can learn about the illegal activities they are accused of. The allegations are often extremely vague, in the majority of cases a man and a woman are identified in the barest detail and simply ordered to stay away from each other. More specific entries include an accusation of adultery, concubinage, or cohabitation. Some cases involve multiple partners, as we saw with Sister Marie and the Abbess of Bricot described above.

The adultery cases are only rarely identified specifically as such and not always easy to identify. While some cases make mention of adultery as part of the offence, usually the type of sexual relationship is not defined as such. Certainly any alleged sexual relationship involving a woman described as married must be an adultery case, and 211 cases meet that description. In only 40 cases, however, are men identified as married, and quite probably many more of them were.

Concubinage is mentioned specifically in 189 cases, not including the many more cases that involved cohabitation or at least a serious and stable, if illegal, union. Women accused of concubinage while working as housekeepers for a monk or parish priest were most often described as widows, but wives and daughters fell under frequent suspicion.

Having offered an analysis of the statistical information, we can now turn to several cases that can be traced both over time and across different types of sources.

The summons and citations for alleged illegal sexual activity of one parish curate spanned a twelve-year period. Nicolas de la Roterie, curate of St. Jean de Bonneval, first appears in the sentence register in 1442, when one Marianne, the widow of Nicolas Jaucier, came before the court and received a written warning to avoid his company.<sup>59</sup> A few days later, Nicolas himself received a written warning to avoid

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<sup>59</sup> G4171f34r. Mercurii post Assumptionis (Wednesday 22 August 1442). Nos officialis monitus in scriptis Mariona relicta defunctis Nicolai Jaucier ne de cetero frequentet cum domino Nicolao de Rotaria curatum sancti Johannis Bonevallis.

Marianne, described here as his housekeeper.<sup>60</sup> In October both return, separately once more, to the court. Nicolas is reminded to eject Marianne from his home, and Marianne is given a second warning to stay away from Nicolas.<sup>61</sup> This is the last we hear of their alleged relationship.

In 1449, however, another widow, one Johanna, was warned not to consort scandalously with Nicolas, who was accused of keeping her as his concubine, on penalty of excommunication and 40 *sous*.<sup>62</sup> The accusation of concubinage usually implied a long-term and serious live-in relationship, with the possibility of the woman being recognized in their community as his mistress. The sum of 40 *sous* was a relatively large amount, which suggests either the seriousness of the offence, or that this is not the first time Johanna was warned in some way to end her relationship with Nicolas.

We lose sight of Nicolas for about another five years, until his reappearance in 1454, when Henrietta the wife of Jean le Dyablat is warned on pain of 100 *sous*, excommunication, and other legal penalties not to frequent scandalously Nicolas. As citations concerning Nicolas' activities have continued into the 1450s, we now can refer to other sources. A fine register beginning from 1450 allows us to see if they paid any fines and a case register dating from 1453 contains entries related to sessions described in the sentence register. In both cases we can offer some findings here. The case register provides more information on Henrietta and Nicolas in an entry for the same date alleging that she, despite being a married woman, frequently committed adultery with Nicolas de la Roterie and perhaps with others as well. She confessed to the relationship with Nicolas de la Roterie and was fined 40 *livres*, but this was reduced to one gold *ecu* and a pound of wax.<sup>63</sup> The register of fines paid to the officiality court also bears fruit: in 1454 Henrietta

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<sup>60</sup> G4171f34r. Sabbati post Bartholomeu (Saturday 25 August 1442). Nos officialis monitus in scriptis dominum Nicolau de Roturia curatum Sancti Johannis Bonevallis ne de cetero frequentet cum Mariona relicta defunctis Nicolai Jaucier eius pedisseca.

<sup>61</sup> G4171f34v. Veneris post Remigis in octis (Wednesday October 3 1442). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Nicolau de Roteria vt [brevi tempore] abiectat Marionna eius pedisseca. Veneris ante Sanctos (Friday October 26 1442). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis praedictam Marionnam ne amplius frequentet cum domino Nicholas dicta Marionna relictam defunctis magister Tuoti Biecon. This is obviously not the same name as previously given for Marianne's deceased husband, but we can reasonably assume that some mistake was made and the case refers to the same woman.

<sup>62</sup> G4171f88v. Jovis post Barnabas (Thursday 14 June 1454). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Henriettam uxorem Johannis le dyablat ne de cetero frequentet in scandalum cum domino Nicolao de Roteria curatum Bonevalli sub excommunicatis centum soldi tournensis et aliis penis iuris.

<sup>63</sup> G4173f16v. Jovis post barnabam (Thursday 13 June 1454). Item Henriettam uxorem Johannes le dyablat. Huyard proposuit quod licet dicta Henrietta sit conugata commisit pluribus et tantis vicibus adulterium cum domino Nicolai de la Roterie presbytero curato parrochie ecclesie sancti Johannis Bonevalis et cum pluri alius confitetur fuisse cum dicto curato et fuit monita in scriptis.

made at least partial payment with half an *ecu*.<sup>64</sup> We do not know, however, if she made any further installments as her name does not appear again in the register.

While Nicolas de la Roterie may not have paid any fines for his alleged indiscretions, Jean de Thien, the curate of Gaya, paid 200 *sous* and two pounds of wax for an illegal relationship with his housekeeper, Marianne, who paid a pound of wax.<sup>65</sup> This payment made in 1455 did not mark the end, however, of their relationship or of their summons before the court. The following year, Jean and Marianne appeared before the official. Jean was warned on penalty of excommunication, suspension, and 100 *sous* to quit the company of Marianne, his concubine.<sup>66</sup> Several days later Marianne, described as the daughter of the deceased Robert Lorinet and the housekeeper of Jean de Thien, received the standard written warning to stay away from her master on penalty of excommunication and ten *livres*.<sup>67</sup> We have seen already, then, a fairly wide variety in the fines demanded and paid, but with an emphasis on heavier sums. The next case offers a more common payment of 20 *sous*.

In 1450, the official read out a written warning to Gillonetta, the widow of Jean Girardi of Morvilliers not to visit scandalously the priest Jean Ragon on penalty of excommunication and 40 *sous*.<sup>68</sup> The next day Jean Ragon appeared before the court for receipt of a similar warning. Here Gillonetta is described as his housekeeper. He is not threatened with any explicit fine, only excommunication and unspecified legal penalties.<sup>69</sup> If any fines were demanded in fact from Gillonetta we have no record of payment, but one Jean Ragon of Brienne-la-Château paid a fine that year of 20 *sous*.<sup>70</sup>

We find a reverse situation in 1452, when Michel Angenost of Nogent-sur-Seine was told to give up his concubine Johanna de la Mote on penalty of

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<sup>64</sup> G247f3v (1454) Henrietta la diablante ex resta dividium scutum.

<sup>65</sup> G247f19r (1455) Dominus Johannes Thien cure de gaya 200 soldi tournensis 2 livre cere. G247f19v (1455) Marionnia pedissecur de Gaya 1 livre cere.

<sup>66</sup> G4171f91v. Jovis post synodum (Thursday mid-May 1456). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis dominum Johannem de Thien presbyterum curatum de Gaya [Gyeum, Giey-sur-Aujon, Haute-Marne] ne de cetero sub penis excommunicationis et centum soldi conversaretur cum Marieta eius concubinato et sub penis suspensionis.

<sup>67</sup> G4171f92r. Mercuri ante Barnaba (Wednesday 9 June 1456). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis mariteam filiam defuncti robreti lorinet pedissecam domini Johannis de Thien curatum de gaya ne de cetero frequentet cum dicto curato sub penis excommunicationis et x livre tournensis.

<sup>68</sup> G4171f70v. Die Lune post Ascentionem Domini (Monday 18 May 1450). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Gilonnetta relicta defunctis Johannis Girardi de Morvillare ne de cetero frequentet in scandalum cum domino Johanno Ragen presbytero sub penam excommunicationis et xl soldi tournensis.

<sup>69</sup> G4171f70v. Martis post Vocem Jocunditatis (Tuesday 19 May 1450). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis dominum Johannem Ragon ne de cetero frequentet in scandalum cum Gilonnetta relicta defunctis Johannis Girardi olim eius pedissecam sub pena excommunicationis et aliis [penis] iuris.

<sup>70</sup> G247f1bis (1450) Dominus Johannes Ragon de Brenacastro xx soldi tournensis.

excommunication and 100 *sous*, and she was later given a similar warning with the same penalties. In this case the only payment we have record of is the penitential pound of wax offered by Joanna a year before the sentence was recorded.<sup>71</sup> As I argued previously, no clear differentiation of treatment can be found between men and women, and this comes out as much with the examples as it does with the statistical analysis. Some cases, however, involved more than payment of burdensome fines.

Another Johanna, the wife of one Pierre le Maistre, a viticulturist of Troyes, received severe punishment for her adultery and concubinage with one Guillaume le Breton, a carpenter. In 1449 she was warned not to frequent scandalously Guillaume the carpenter, on pain of excommunication, 100 *sous*, and other judicial penalties.<sup>72</sup>

Five years later she appeared again before the officiality court, and for the same offence. Here she confessed to having continued to live in concubinage with Guillaume le Breton, the carpenter, despite having been given a written warning to leave him on penalty of excommunication and 100 *sous*. The official ruled that she had incurred the threatened penalties.<sup>73</sup> Guillaume was given a warning at this time and was sent away without punishment.<sup>74</sup> On the same date, a more formal and complete warning was entered into the sentence register against him, with a penalty of excommunication and 100 *sous*.<sup>75</sup>

About ten days later Joanna appeared again. Apparently part of her penalty had been imprisonment, as this record notes her release, and her fine of 100 *sous* is reduced to 40 *sous*.<sup>76</sup> Imprisonment of a few days to a few weeks seems to have

<sup>71</sup> G4171f76r. Mercuri post Ascensionem Domini (Wednesday 24 May 1452). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Micheletum Angenost clericum de Nogento supra Secanam [Nogent-sur-Seine, Aube] ne de cetero frequentet in scandalum cum Johanneta de la Mote eius concubinato sub penis excommunicationis et centum soldi tournensis. Deinde similiter monitus dictam Johannetam ne de cetero frequentet cum dicto Micheletto et sub dictis penis. G247f20v (1451) Johanneta Bonnel alias de la Mote 1 livre cere.

<sup>72</sup> G4171f68v. Veneris post Lupum et Egidi (Friday 5 September 1449). Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Johanneta uxorem Petri le Maistre viticole Trecensis conmorens ne de cetero frequentet in scandalum cum Guillemo le charpentier sub excommunicationis et centum soldi ac aliis penis iuris.

<sup>73</sup> G4173f16v. Jovis post Barnabam (Thursday 13 June 1454). Johannam uxorem Petri le Maistre confitetur quod alias fuit in concubinato cum quoddam guillemo le breton carpentieri et fuit moneta in scriptis de non conversando cum dicta Johanna sub pena excommunicationis et centum soldi turnonsis et fuit declarata incurrisse penas monitionis.

<sup>74</sup> G4173f16v. Jovis post Barnabam (Thursday 13 June 1454). Item contra predictam Guillelam super predictam concubinato fuit monitus in scriptis. Remissi sine emenda.

<sup>75</sup> G4171f88v. Jovis post Barnabam. (Thursday 13 June 1454) Dominus officialis monitus in scriptis Guillemam le Breton charpentier ne de cetero frequentet in scandalum cum Johanna uxorem Petri le Maistre sub excommunicationis centum soldi et aliis penis iuris.

<sup>76</sup> G4173f21v. Veneris ante Nativitatis Johannis (Friday 22 June 1454). Item Johannetam uxorem Petri le Maistre emendavit quod fuit in concubinato et adulterio cum quodam Guillemo le charpentier

been a fairly common part of the process for repeat or serious offenders such as Johanna. Both men and women are noted as released from prison with some frequency. The prison was on the first floor of the bishop's palace, where the officiality court also administered justice, and consisted of three rooms, one designated for women.<sup>77</sup> Prisoners were expected to pay their own expenses and it is reasonable to assume that conditions were far from comfortable. Once released from prison, if Joanna ever paid her fine we have no record of it. Guillaume, however, paid a fine of 60 *sous* in 1460.<sup>78</sup>

Having looked at some examples of more or less typical cases of sexual offences prosecuted by the officiality court of Troyes, one is left wondering if and how these 856 sexual encounters took place. Certainly, unless an alleged offender was convicted and sentenced, nothing was proven so much as suspected.<sup>79</sup> The majority of cases are perhaps best understood as warnings to avoid falling under further suspicion. It seems reasonable even with that qualification to assume a good deal of illicit sexual activity was taking place within the community, and it is unquestionably clear the official and his court presented themselves as regulators of sexual activity in the diocese.

The goal of church officials in fifteenth century western Christendom was not to eradicate so much as regulate the sexual activity of the community. Married people could sleep only with each other and only for good reasons, if they wished to avoid sin. Ordained clerics ought not ever have sexual relationships with women, not their maids, not prostitutes, and certainly not their unhappily married parishioners.

Late medieval theology expressed great concern that sexual behavior be restrained to marriage. As we have seen, this same attention to marriage can be found in the prosecution of sexual offences on the diocese of Troyes. When prosecuting sexual offences, the ecclesiastical court concerned itself above all with policing the boundaries of legitimate sex, in an effort to protect the sanctity of marriage. This meant attempting to stop people who should not be sleeping with each other from doing so. Sex in inappropriate positions, prostituted, or non-procreative sex left virtually no traces in officiality records. The prosecution addressed illegal combination of persons rather than manner of sexual activity. While a statistical analysis suggests that the officiality court of Troyes may have

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taxatus centum soldi reductis ad xl soldi tournensis.

<sup>77</sup> Christelle Walravens, "L'Officialité épiscopale de Troyes à la fin du Moyen Age," Ph.D. dissertation, École des Chartres, 2001, 108–09.

<sup>78</sup> G247f11r (1460) G le Breton charpenter l x soldi tournensis.

<sup>79</sup> The promoter or an accuser claimed an illegal activity had occurred, or sufficient rumor or *mala fama* existed for the case to be brought before the official, but the case did not necessarily move forward to sentencing.

targeted acts involving clergy, the types of sexual offence they prosecuted with the greatest consistency were those perceived as threatening to the sacrament of marriage. What the bishop's court moved most to regulate was generative sex, sex that should have taken place within a marriage.

The Church has always had a complicated, but never wholly negative, response to sexuality. Throughout the history of the Church this conflict exists, a dialogue, among Christians trying to handle the ambiguity of their situation. A society that wants to perpetrate itself has to permit and even endorse sexuality, try to regulate and monitor it. The payments, candles, and prison terms levied against sexual offenders were intended to rectify the wrong, to purify the individual and the community. And western Christendom constituted a community whose belief systems privileged purity, perhaps above all sexual purity, but a community at the same time dependent on sex and marriage for survival. When marriage and even sex became holy, all participants now had to pay the costs that arrived with their new responsibilities.



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## Das Freudenhaus im Mittelalter: *In der stat was gesessen / ain unrainer pulian . . .*<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Based on the Middle High German adaptation of the classical narrative of *Apollonius* (2nd century C.E.), this article deals with the urban house of pleasure (brothel) as presented in word and image. Due to the survival of three illustrated editions we are able to give a detailed description of this institution, brothel owners and their servants. The interpretation draws from the results of extensive historical research and compliments this with a discussion of a wide range of late-medieval and early-modern literary examples.

The consulted literary sources speak only of female prostitutes, but we must keep in mind the authors' didactic intentions, the targeted audience, and the tendencies of the patrons' interests. The *Fastnachtspiele* (Shrovetide Plays), which convey a colorful, multifarious image of the world of the late Middle Ages, were written for the amusement and education of the audience according to the Horatian principle of *prodesse et delectare*. Similarly, in his novel *Apollonius of Tyrus* (ca. 1300), the Viennese author Heinrich von Neustadt presents the destiny of a young sex slave, which actually points to a still existing problem today. Tarsia, however, is able to escape her predicament because as a king's daughter she is

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius von Tyrland*, nach der Gothaer Handschrift (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1906), Verse 15543–44; *Leben und Abenteuer des großen Königs Apollonius von Tyrus zu Land und zur See*. Übertragen mit allen Miniaturen der Wiener Handschrift C, mit Anmerkungen und einem Nachwort von Helmut Birkhan (Bern, Berlin, Brüssel, et al.: Peter Lang, 2001).



highly educated. She is saved, first, by the help of God (according to the author) and also through a servant's mercy. Both this text and all other literary sources consulted here were written by male authors, some of whom undoubtedly display misogynous tendencies, which colors, of course, their perspectives toward prostitutes.

By contrast, we know little about the real lives of harlots. Historical sources reflect the lives and views of the nobility and neglect the poor and the outcasts, hence normally also these female sex slaves. Focusing on poetry, interesting insights concerning medieval women's slavery, legal versus illegal brothels as well as working conditions and reputation of prostitutes can be gained.

Due to its didactic tendencies, Middle High German literature provides insights into the lives of real and fictitious characters. The analysis of poetic sources therefore significantly adds to our understanding of medieval times as drawn up by historical research.

Es sind weltweit wenige historische Bauten überliefert, die eindeutig als Frauenhäuser identifiziert werden können. Das wahrscheinlich bekannteste, der Antike entstammende Freudenhaus ist jenes in Pompeii. Das überlieferte italienische Exempel, welches 79 n. Chr. durch den Vesusausbruch verschüttet und dadurch konserviert worden war, gehörte zu den 25 städtischen Häusern, in denen Prostitution ausgeübt wurde, ja es war das "größte und bestgestaltete."<sup>2</sup> Dieses *lupanare* lag keineswegs dezentral oder verborgen, es befand sich gegenüber den Stabianer Thermen. Es hatte zwei Geschosse mit je fünf Zimmern. In das Obergeschoß konnte man im Inneren über eine Holzterrasse und von der Gasse über eine Galerie durch einen weiteren Eingang gelangen. Die äußerst engen Räume waren jeweils nur mit einem gemauerten Bett mit Kopfteil ausgestattet. Im Erdgeschoss schmückte ein Dekorationszyklus mit erotischen Bildern die Türen der Kammereingänge (Abb. 1).<sup>3</sup> Die Vorlagen für diese Wandmalereien entstammten vermutlich "Kataloge[n] von erotischen Stellungen, die auf griechische Vorbilder zurückgingen."<sup>4</sup> Weiters befinden sich im *lupanare* Graffiti, die auf die Herkunft der Prostituierten schließen lassen. Demnach kamen die Sklavinnen meist aus Griechenland oder dem Orient und mussten ihren Verdienst komplett abliefern. Der Preis für ihre Dienstleistungen war sehr gering,

<sup>2</sup> Pier Giovanni Guzzo, *Pompeii*. Führer durch die Ausgrabungen (Napoli: electa, 2002), 112.

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Varone, "Das Lupanar," *Pompeii*, hg. Filippo Coarelli (München: Hirmer, 2002), 194–201, 404.

<sup>4</sup> Guzzo, *Pompeii*, 112.

er lag zwischen zwei und acht *as* (für ein *as* bekam man eine Portion einfachen Wein).<sup>5</sup>

Hier soll jedoch nicht die Geschichte der Prostitution in der Antike betrachtet werden, sondern diejenige des Mittelalters, indem ich einen mentalitätsgeschichtlichen Ansatz verfolgen werde. Mittelalterliche Gebäude, in denen nachweislich Prostitution betrieben wurde, sind nicht erhalten. Lediglich einige wenige überlieferte Federzeichnungen in mittelalterlichen und frühneuhochdeutschen Codices und Inkunabeln vermitteln uns in Wort und Bild Imaginationen derartiger Gebäude, wie die nachstehenden Ausführungen zeigen werden. Eine hervorragende Verbindung zwischen Antike und Mittelalter bildet die Geschichte vom König Apollonius von Tyrus, deren antike Quelle dem ersten nachchristlichen Jahrhundert entstammt und die einen exzellenten Einblick in die Thematik des Frauenhandels und der Freudenhäuser gewährt.

Die Geschichte der Freudenhäuser und der Prostitution ist seit Jahrzehnten ein beliebtes Forschungsfeld. Vor allem durch die historischen Untersuchungen wissen wir, dass sich die Prostitution von der Akzeptanz im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert zur Institutionalisierung im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert und schließlich zum weitgehenden Verbot im 16. Jahrhundert entwickelte.<sup>6</sup> Gut erforscht sind der Prozess der Gründung und Institutionalisierung von Freudenhäusern durch Kommunitäten, deren Organisation, die Arbeitsbedingungen der Prostituierten usw.<sup>7</sup> Im Folgenden soll das uns bisher vertraute historische Bild mit Aussagen aus literarischen Quellen ergänzt werden. Mittelhochdeutsche und frühneuhochdeutsche Literatur spielte bislang in der Erforschung von Prostitution und Freudenhäusern kaum eine Rolle, dennoch erlauben literarische Quellen wie Epik, Lyrik, Autobiografie und didaktische Werke, bunte Einsichten in die Materie zu gewinnen, das Bild abzurunden und neue Aspekte zu erschließen. Literatur hat Plots, erzählt Geschichten, die Szenen müssen beschrieben werden, die *dramatis personae* werden charakterisiert und sie handeln. Die Autoren liefern detailreiche Einsichten in den Alltag, und besonders Lieder (Gedichte) und Autobiografien basieren oft auf persönlicher Erfahrung. Vielmals sind sie für uns Interpreten späterer Jahrhunderte sogar als informative Apologien zu lesen. Die Tendenz

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<sup>5</sup> Guzzo, *Pompeii*, 112.

<sup>6</sup> Siehe dazu auch die Beiträge in diesem Band von Sara McDougall und Jennifer D. Thibodeaux.

<sup>7</sup> Iwan Bloch, *Die Prostitution* (Berlin: Marcus, 1912 und 1925); Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005); Leah Lydia Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc* (Chicago und London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985); Peter Schuster, *Das Frauenhaus: Städtische Bordelle in Deutschland (1350–1600)* (Paderborn, München, Wien und Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992); Beate Schuster, *Die freien Frauen. Dirnen und Frauenhäuser im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt und New York: Campus, 1995).

didaktischer Werke besteht darin, vor Missbrauch und vor Fehlentwicklungen zu warnen. Dramen benötigen theatralische *performance*, die in der Szene, wo der Plot handelt, lokalisiert ist, sowie der Requisiten.

Um etwa 40 n. Chr. (Vers 14860) siedelte der Wiener Arzt Heinrich von Neustadt seine Vorlage, die lateinische *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*<sup>8</sup> an, die er in seiner mittelhochdeutschen Bearbeitung als *Apollonius von Tyrland* zu Beginn des 14. Jahrhunderts vorlegte.<sup>9</sup> Die lateinische *koronik* lieferte jedoch nur den Stoff für etwa ein Viertel der über 20600 Verse des Romans und bildet bloß die Rahmenerzählung: 1. Ereignisse vom Inzest des Antiochus, Heirat des Apollonius mit Lucina und deren Scheintod bei der Geburt der Tochter Tarsia am Meer. 2. Reiseabenteuer des Königs Apollonius, der vierzehn Jahre im Orient herumirrt, während die tot geglaubte Lucina als Priesterin im Dianatempel in Ephesos (heute Türkei) lebt und 3. die Geschichte der Tarsi

Diese Rahmenerzählung, der Apolloniusstoff, war im Mittelalter weit verbreitet und Grundlage lateinischer wie volkssprachiger Bearbeitungen. Sie fand ebenfalls zu Beginn des 14. Jahrhunderts Eingang in die *Gesta Romanorum* und in die Weltchronistik.<sup>10</sup> Als eigenständige Erzählung in deutscher Sprache wurde der Apolloniusroman im Mittelalter dreimal bearbeitet: im Versroman Heinrichs von Neustadt (um 1300) und in zwei Prosafassungen des 15. Jahrhunderts, dem anonymen *Leipziger Apollonius* (Leipzig, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. 1279, fol. 160v–235r) und Heinrich Steinhöwels *Apollonius von Tyrland* (1461).<sup>11</sup> Der *Leipziger Apollonius* ist eine Übersetzung des lateinischen Apolloniusromans, und Heinrich Steinhöwels *Apollonius* folgt den *Gesta Romanorum* und Gottfried von Viterbos *Pantheon*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri, Die Geschichte vom König Apollonius* übersetzt und eingeleitet von Franz Peter Waiblinger (München: dtv zweisprachig, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Die *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* basiert auf einem verlorenen spätgriechischen Reise- und Liebesroman, der in verschiedenen Redaktionen im Abendland kursierte und in die meisten abendländischen Volkssprachen übertragen wurde; zusammenfassend dazu Peter Ochsenbein, "Heinrich von Neustadt," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*. 2., völlig neu bearbeitet Auflage, hg. Kurt Ruh et al. Bd. 3 (Berlin und New York: de Gruyter, 1981), 840–42; Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre, Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations. Including the Text of the Historia Apollonii regis Tyri* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991); auch Birkhan, *Apollonius*, hat im Nachwort zu seiner Übersetzung den Forschungsstand gut umrissen (393–439).

<sup>10</sup> Elisabeth Lienert, *Deutsche Antikenromane des Mittelalters*. Grundlagen der Germanistik 39 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2001), 165–66.

<sup>11</sup> *Cod. Pal. Germ. 154* (Augsburg: Günther Zainer, 1471) fol. 279r–310r (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>); Augsburg: Johannes Bämmler, 1476, fol. 62r–141v (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>); letzter Zugriff jeweils am 31. März 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Lienert, *Deutsche Antikenromane des Mittelalters*, 173.

Heinrichs von Neustadt *Apollonius von Tyrland* ist in vier weitgehend vollständigen Manuskripten und einem Fragment aus dem 15. Jahrhundert überliefert.<sup>13</sup> Mit Illustrationen ausgestattet sind die Handschriften b (Chart. A 689 der Universitätsbibliothek Erfurt/Gotha) und c (Cod. Vind. 2886 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek Wien).

Für die vorliegende Untersuchung des Freudenhauses im Mittelalter ist die Geschichte der Tarsia im *Apollonius-Roman* Heinrichs von Neustadt von besonderem Interesse. Der Plot folgt in allen Überlieferungsträgern folgendem Schema: Apollonius hatte Tarsia einem Ehepaar aus Tarsus (heute Türkei) zur Pflege gegeben. Die etwa fünfzehnjährige Tarsia wächst zu einem wunderschönen Mädchen heran und erhält eine gute Ausbildung. Nachdem sie von Piraten geraubt worden ist, wird sie in der Stadt Metelin (heute in der Türkei) mit anderen Sklaven auf dem Markt wie ein Stück Vieh zum Verkauf angeboten. Der städtische Bordellbetreiber und Athanagoras, der Stadtherr und Landesfürst, steigern um die Wette. Der Bodellbetreiber erwirbt sie schließlich und zwingt sie, sich im städtischen Freudenhaus zu integrieren. Tarsia gelingt es jedoch, mit Hilfe ihrer außergewöhnlichen Fähigkeiten – sie ist in den *artes liberales* unterrichtet – ihre Unschuld zu bewahren und sich freizukaufen. Der Frauenhausbesitzer wird schließlich verurteilt und auf dem Scheiterhaufen verbrannt.

Unsere Aufmerksamkeit gilt folgenden Motiven der Erzählung: dem Mädchenhandel und Sklavenmarkt, dem städtischen Frauenhaus und dessen Betreiber und den Freudenmädchen.

Verglichen werden die diesbezüglichen Passagen in den *Gesta Romanorum*, in den illustrierten Codices des *Apollonius* des Heinrich von Neustadt (b und c), im *Leipziger Apollonius* und im *Apollonius von Tyrus* des Heinrich Steinhöwel (Druck von 1471 und 1476). Obgleich die Erzählung in den jeweiligen Bearbeitungen im spätgriechischen Mittelmeerraum lokalisiert bleibt, verwandeln die Bearbeiter die Akteure in spätmittelalterliche Zeitgenossen. Von der lateinischen *Historia* wird lediglich die Meeresszenerie beibehalten. Der Charme der Adaptionen liegt in den zahlreichen erläuternden Ergänzungen der Autoren, die interessante Informationen für unsere Thematik ergeben. Vorzügliche Informationen bringen die Illustratoren mit ihren Federzeichnungen und Holzschnitten. Sie transferieren das gesamte Geschehen in die ihnen bekannte mittelalterliche Welt. Als exzeptionell dürfen die Darstellungen der Freudenhäuser, der Frauenwirte und

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<sup>13</sup> Simone Schultz-Balluff, *Dispositio picta – Dispositio imaginum: Zum Zusammenhang von Bild, Text, Struktur und 'Sinn' in den Überlieferungsträgern von Heinrichs von Neustadt "Apollonius von Tyrland"*. Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700, 45 (Bern, Berlin und Brüssel: Peter Lang, 2006), 39–48.

deren Diener sowie der Freudenmädchen in den beiden Handschriften Heinrichs von Neustadt und in den Inkunabeln Heinrich Steinhöwels bezeichnet werden. Sie gewähren außerordentliche Einsichten in die Thematik, verfügen über einen hohen Informationsgehalt und eine beträchtliche Dichte der Darstellung.

## 1. Mädchenhandel und Sklavenmarkt

Selten finden sich Andeutungen zu Frauenhandel in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur. Bemerkenswert sind daher die Darlegungen dieses Phänomens in der Apolloniusüberlieferung. In den *Gesta Romanorum* lautet die Stelle: "Igitur qui puellam rapuerunt venerunt ad civitatem Machilentam; deponitur ergo illa inter cetera manicipia venalis" (523, 10–12; "Die Räuber des Mädchens aber kamen nach der Stadt Machilenta und stellten es mit den übrigen Sklaven zum Verkauf").<sup>14</sup> Heinrich von Neustadt schreibt in seiner Apolloniusbearbeitung, Tarsia wurde im Hafen wie ein Stück Rind zum Verkauf angeboten ("Vailte man hin als ein rint," Vers 15537) der Stadt- und Landesherr Anthagonoras bot "zehen pfund von golde / wol geprant und gewegen" (Vers 15557–58), dem Bordellbetreiber gelang es, ihn mit zwanzig Pfund zu überbieten; er erhielt damit den Zuschlag (Vers 15541, Verse 15556–61). Heinrich Steinhöwels *Apollonius* bringt in den zwei Inkunabeln des 15. Jahrhunderts leicht variierende Versionen. Im Zainerschen Druck von 1471 liest man: "Do ward ußgefüret Tarsia mit andern scheffan und offenlich fail gebotten" (fol. 300v).<sup>15</sup> Der Druck des Johannes Bämle von 1476 bringt die Erzählung Wort für Wort identisch, nur der Ausdruck 'Sklave' erhält den erläuternden Zusatz: "schleven d(a)z sein leüt die man verkaufft" (fol. 117r).<sup>16</sup> Ein Holzschnitt verdeutlicht den Menschenhandel im Hafen (Abb. 2). Am Land warten der Stadt- und Landesherr *Anthagonoras* und (vermutlich) sein Diener. Im Zentrum des Schiffes steht Tarsia umringt von den Räufern, die sie entführten und nun zum Verkauf anbieten.

Bemerkungen zu Menschenhandel finden sich sonst nur vereinzelt in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur. In *Flore und Blanscheflur* (mittelhochdeutsche Fassung um 1220 von Konrad Fleck nach einer altfranzösischen Quelle) wird das Christenmädchen *Blanscheflur* in Spanien für einen sehr hohen Preis an

<sup>14</sup> *Gesta romanorum*, hg. Hermann Oesterley (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1872); *Gesta Romanorum: Geschichten von den Römern*. Ein Erzählbuch des Mittelalters. Erstmals in vollständiger Übersetzung hg. Winfried Trillitzsch (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1973), 330.

<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, Cod. Pal. Germ. 154 (Augsburg: Günther Zainer, 1471), (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Steinhöwel, *Apollonius* (Augsburg: Johannes Bämle, 1476), (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

babylonische Kaufleute verkauft; diese verkaufen es in Babylon weiter an einen Emir, der sie in einen Turm einsperrt, um sie eines Tages zu heiraten (Verse 1516 und 1673–79).<sup>17</sup> Auch der von norwegischen Kaufleuten entführte Tristan soll für hohen Gewinn verkauft werden (Verse 2300–21).<sup>18</sup>

Sklaverei und Menschenhandel waren in Europa und in Byzanz bis ins Spätmittelalter verbreitet; im Gegensatz zu der Entwicklung in den überseeischen Gebieten und in Byzanz verbesserte sich freilich ab dem 16. Jahrhundert in Europa die Situation der Sklaven erheblich.<sup>19</sup> Der neuhochdeutsche Begriff 'Sklave' (engl. 'slave') leitet sich vom mittellateinischen 'sclavus' ab. Das Substantiv ist gleichen Ursprungs wie die Eigenbezeichnung der slawischen Völker- und Sprachgruppe. 'Slawe' bedeutete in mittelhochdeutschen Quellen sowohl einen Angehörigen slawischer Stämme als auch einen unfreien, aller Rechte beraubten Menschen. Aus historischen und sachlichen Gründen wird eine Bedeutungsverschiebung von Slawe zu Sklave bereits für das 9. oder 10. Jahrhundert auf dem Balkan angesetzt.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Das städtische Freudenhaus<sup>21</sup>

Das Frauenhaus wird in mittelhochdeutschen literarischen Quellen als 'hürhuß',<sup>22</sup> offen sunthaus,<sup>23</sup> 'huorenhaus',<sup>24</sup> 'gemain frowenhuß'<sup>25</sup> oder 'gemain huß der

<sup>17</sup> Konrad Fleck, *Flore und Blanscheflur*, 2. Aufl., hg. Wolfgang Golther. Deutsche National-Litteratur, 3. Abteilung 4,2 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, o.J.).

<sup>18</sup> Gottfried von Straßburg, *Tristan*, hg. Rüdiger Krohn, mittelhochdeutsch/neuhochdeutsch. 8. Aufl. (1980; Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), Verse 4471–73.

<sup>19</sup> Beate Schuster, "Frauenhandel und Frauenhäuser im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert," *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 78, 2 (1991): 172–89; G. Prinzing, "Sklave," *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, Bd. 7 (1995), Sp. 1983–85.

<sup>20</sup> *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, erarbeitet im Zentralinstitut für Sprachwissenschaft, unter der Leitung von Wolfgang Pfeifer (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995), 1299–1300.

<sup>21</sup> Franz Irsigler und Arnold Lassotta, *Bettler und Gaukler – Dirnen und Henker. Randgruppen und Außenseiter in Köln 1300–1600*. Aus der Kölner Stadtgeschichte (Köln: Greven, 1984), 180–98; Beate Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 88–102.

<sup>22</sup> Eilhart von Oberge, *Tristrant*, Edition diplomatique des manuscrits et traduction en français moderne avec introduction, notes et index. Hg. Danielle Buschinger, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 202 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1976), 36–39; Eilhart von Oberge, *Tristrant und Isalde*, hg. Danielle Buschinger und Wolfgang Spiewok. Wodan, 27. Greifswalder Beiträge zum Mittelalter Serie 1, Band 7 (Greifswald: Reineke, 1993), 13, Vers 461.

<sup>23</sup> Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius*, Verse 15548 und 15597.

<sup>24</sup> *Fastnachtspiele aus dem fünfzehnten Jahrhundert* hg. Adelbert Keller. 3 Bde. Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins 28–30, (Stuttgart: Laupp, 1853), hier Bd. 2, 865, Nr. 110, Vers 25.

<sup>25</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 300v (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

sünden<sup>26</sup> bezeichnet. Der Terminus 'Bordell' wird um 1500 über mittelniederländisch 'bordeel' aus altfranzösisch, spanisch 'bordel'<sup>27</sup> entlehnt; möglich ist für das Deutsche auch eine Entlehnung aus italienisch 'bordello,' das gleichfalls aus dem altfranzösischen stammt und eigentlich 'Bretterhüttchen,' 'kleiner Bauernhof' bedeutet und ein Diminutiv von altfranzösisch 'borde,' Hütte, ist. Er begegnet zum ersten Mal in Fischarts *Geschichtsklitterung*.<sup>28</sup> Bordell wird zu engl. *brothel* verdreht.<sup>29</sup> *Lupanar* findet sich in mittellateinischen Quellen.<sup>30</sup>

'Hürhuß' begegnet in der Heidelberger Handschrift (cod.pal.germ 346) des *Tristrant* von Eilhart von Oberg. In den Versen 460–64 sagt Morold über die Mädchen, die er als Tribut von den zinspflichtigen Ländern verlangt: "so will ich die maidlin / minem hürhus tûn zû, / dass sie mir spât und frû / gewinnen dar inne / vil pfenninge." In D lautet die Stelle: "die knapen sollin myn eigin sin / und will alle die meigetin / mit unkuscheit laßin wynnin / silber und pfennyngen." In D fehlt der Ort der Berufsausübung.<sup>31</sup> Gottfried von Straßburg äußert zu Morolds Zinsforderung, dass die Barone aus Cornwall und England keine Mädchen, sondern nur Knaben übergeben wollten ("niht megede, niuwan knebelîn" Vers 5967). Vor Gottfried hat vielleicht bereits Thomas d'Angleterre (um 1160/70) gegen diese Version polemisiert.<sup>32</sup>

Im europäischen städtischen Bordellwesen des Mittelalters ist eindeutig eine Kontinuität aus der Antike erkennbar, insofern als römische Institutionen nachgeahmt oder weiterbetrieben wurden. Im Frankenreich wurden auf den Gütern der Großen Mägdehäuser als förmliche Bordelle angelegt.<sup>33</sup> Die Apolloniustradition spiegelt diese Entwicklung in der Geschichte der Tarsia. Nachdem Tarsia vom städtischen Bordellbetreiber gekauft worden ist, wird sie in allen Versionen der Apolloniusüberlieferung in den Besucherraum des Freudenhauses gebracht, wo ihr der Frauenwirt befiehlt, den Gott Priapos

<sup>26</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 301r (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Pfeifer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, 159.

<sup>28</sup> Johann Fischart, *Geschichtsklitterung* (Gargantua), hg. Hildegard Schnabel. Synoptischer Abdruck der Fassungen von 1575, 1582 und 1590 (Halle/Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1969), 91.

<sup>29</sup> Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* 2 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1860, Nachdruck München: DTV, 1984), 240.

<sup>30</sup> *Gesta romanorum*, ed. Oesterley S. 523, 221; *Carmina Burana*, Die Lieder der Benediktbeurer Handschrift, zweisprachige Ausgabe (München: DTV, 1985), Lied 120.

<sup>31</sup> H und D sind Papierhandschriften aus dem Ende des 15. Jahrhunderts, gehen jedoch vermutlich auf ein Manuskript des 13. Jahrhunderts zurück (Eilhart von Oberg, *Tristrant*, ed. Danielle Buschinger, XXVIII).

<sup>32</sup> Lambertus Okken, *Kommentar zum Tristan-Roman Gottfrieds von Strassburg*. Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur, 57, 58, 81 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984) 3 Bände, hier Bd. 1, 313; Joseph Bédier, *Le Roman de Tristan par Thomas*. Poème du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle. 2 Bde. (Paris: Brailie de Firmin Didot, 1902), 75–83.

<sup>33</sup> Bloch, *Prostitution*, 737–39.

anzubeten. Anschließend wird ein Diener gerufen, der sie köstlich kleiden und schmücken soll.<sup>34</sup> In den verschiedenen *Apollonius*-Bearbeitungen wird die Deflorierung der Tarsia in einer Ankündigung angeboten, die in Steinhöwels Fassungen (als Ergänzung) an das äußere Tor des Freudenhauses angeschlagen werden soll.<sup>35</sup> Am dritten Tage wird sie dann von dem Kuppler, „dem der übrige Haufen seiner Mädchen voranging, unter Musikbegleitung in das Freudenhaus geführt.“<sup>36</sup> Dort stößt man sie in eine Kammer (Vers 15646), wo sie die Freier bedienen soll. Der Verlauf des ersten Tages im Freudenhaus wird in allen Versionen etwa gleich lautend erzählt. Tarsia rettet ihre Unschuld, indem sie allen Freiern von ihrem Unglück erzählt. Als erster begibt sich der Stadt- und Landesherr „mit verhülltem Haupt“ in ihr Gemach, ihm folgen sein Diener und andere Männer. Allen erzählt sie ihre Geschichte, alle geben ihr Geld, das sie am Abend dem Wirten übergibt.

In der Inkunabel von 1471 Heinrich Steinhöwels (Abb. 3) ist diese Szene als Holzschnitt bildlich überliefert. Sie trägt die Überschrift „Wie Tarsia von dem künig<sup>37</sup> und meniglichen unvermeÿliget bleib / und wie sÿ alle man beweget in parmherczikeit dz sÿ wainen wurden“ (fol. 119r). Der Holzschnitt zeigt ein Gebäude über einem fließenden Wasser. Im Innenraum stehen Tarsia und der König (mit gekröntem Haupt), der sie an der Brust berührt. Auf einer Brücke, die zum Gebäude führt, warten zwei weitere Freier. Das Gebäude evoziert Assoziationen mit einem Badhaus, obgleich im Kontext sich dieser Terminus nirgends findet. Eine wesentlich bessere Vorstellung vom Frauenhaus vermittelt der Illustrator der Frühdrucke des *Apollonius* Heinrichs von Neustadt (b109, fol. 123r und c 94, fol. 98r). Die Illustration des Wiener Codex (Abb. 4) zeigt ein einstöckiges gemauertes Haus mit Treppengiebel, Schornstein und verglasten Fenstern. An das Giebelhaus angebaut befindet sich ein ebenfalls gemauerter Zubau mit Turm. Dieses Areal, das möglicherweise auch über einen Garten verfügt, wird geschützt durch einen Torbau und eine ziegelgedeckte Mauer mit Wehrgang.<sup>38</sup> Im oberen Stock des Hauses zeigen sich zwei Prostituierte an den Rundbogenfenstern.<sup>39</sup> Unter dem Portal des Torbaus steht eine weitere

<sup>34</sup> *Gesta Romanorum* (ed. Trillitzsch), 331; Heinrich von Neustadt, Verse 15580–637; Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1476, 118r,v (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008); Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 301r (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 301r (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008); Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1476, 118v (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>36</sup> *Gesta Romanorum* (ed. Trillitzsch), 331–32.

<sup>37</sup> In Steinhöwels Bearbeitung wurde der *furste* (Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius* Vers 15567 u.ö.) zum König.

<sup>38</sup> Vgl. dazu Irsigler und Lassotta, *Bettler und Gaukler*, 183–85; Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 96.

<sup>39</sup> Die Mädchen wurden angehalten, männliche Passanten zu animieren, in dem Gedicht



Prostituierte und zeigt auf ein vor ihr sich umarmendes Paar. Gezeichnet (Federzeichnung!) wurde die Kammer der Tarsia (Vers 15646) als Schauraum. Die Jungfrau trägt das Haar offen und hat die Hände im Gebet zum Himmel erhoben. Der Stadtherr Anthagonoras hat Tarsia soeben verlassen und der nächste Freier hat bereits den Türgriff in der Hand.

In Handschrift c ist der im Text wiedergegebene Wortwechsel der Männer illustriert ("Der fragt in der märe/ Wie es im ergangen wäre. / Do sprach der herre tugent vol / 'Pey meinem treuwen, vaste woll'" Verse 15744–47). Die Männer sehen einander an, Anthagonoras macht eine wohlwollende Handbewegung. Auch in Handschrift b (109, fol. 123rab) ist das Freudenhaus ein stattliches gemauertes Gebäude, ausgestattet mit wesentlich mehr Fenstern und Türen als in Handschrift c.<sup>40</sup> Die Architektur beider Zeichnungen verortet das Bordell in eine mittelalterliche Stadt nördlich der Alpen. Wir sehen die Darstellungen solide gebauter, großer Bordelle mit Ziegel- oder Steinmauern und Glasfenstern, wie sie im 15. Jahrhundert etwa in Würzburg, München und Nürnberg errichtet wurden.<sup>41</sup> Häufiger jedoch vermitteln die historischen Quellen das Bild baufälliger, schlecht gebauter Bordelle, die mehr Bretterhütten ähnelten als Häusern.<sup>42</sup> Über die topographische Lage dieser beiden Frauenhäuser erlauben die Illustrationen keine Schlüsse, obgleich auffällt, dass angrenzende Häuser (wie bei anderen Illustrationen beider Codices) fehlen. Sie waren in Deutschland und Österreich durchwegs am Stadtrand lokalisiert.<sup>43</sup>

Auch Kleidung und Haartracht der Personen sind typisch für diese geographischen Breiten. Die Oberbekleidung der Männer besteht aus Sacke, Kniehose und Beinlingen, die Mädchen tragen körperbetonende Röcke mit weiten Halsausschnitten, Gürteln und geschlitzten Ärmeln.<sup>44</sup>

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*Liebesabenteuer in Konstanz* sitzt eine Dirne am Fenster, in: Hanns Fischer, *Die deutsche Märendichtung des 15. Jahrhunderts*. Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des 15. Jahrhunderts, 12 (München: Beck, 1966), 384–87, Nr. 45; vgl. dazu Schuster, *Frauenhaus*, 77.

<sup>40</sup> Schultz-Balluff, *Dispositio picta – Dispositio imaginum*, 238.

<sup>41</sup> Schuster, *Frauenhaus*, 58–59; Jacques Rossiaud, *Dame Venus*. Prostitution im Mittelalter (München: Beck, 1989), 13.

<sup>42</sup> Leah, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*, 52–53.

<sup>43</sup> Beate Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 98–102; Annette Lömker-Schlöggell, "Prostituierte – umbevermeydung willen merers üfels in der cristenhait," *Randgruppen der spätmittelalterlichen Gesellschaft*, hg. Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller (Wahrendorf: Fahlbusch, 1990), 52–85; hier 57.

<sup>44</sup> Siehe <http://www.imareal.oew.ac.at/realonline> mit dem Link zum Kleiderlexikon (letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

### 3. Prostituierte

In den literarischen Quellen finden wir die Bezeichnung: 'schone weib',<sup>45</sup> 'schöne frawen',<sup>46</sup> 'vaile weib',<sup>47</sup> 'offen synderin',<sup>48</sup> 'gemeynen weib',<sup>49</sup> 'huor',<sup>50</sup> 'gemain vrawlein', 'gemain weib'<sup>51</sup> und 'hüpsche frawen'.<sup>52</sup>

Die historischen Quellen berichten von rücksichtsloser finanzieller und körperlicher Ausbeutung der im Frauenhaus wohnenden und arbeitenden Frauen.<sup>53</sup> Dagegen wird den Lesern in den wenigen literarischen Werken, die dieses Problem thematisieren, wenig über die sozialen Umstände derartiger Daseinsformen geboten. Im *Tristrant* des Eilhart von Oberg fordert Morolt als Zins vom tributpflichtigen König Marke jedes dritte Kind, das in den letzten fünfzehn Jahren geboren worden war. Während die Knaben seine Leibeigenen werden sollten, wolle er die Mädchen "von früh bis spät" in seinem Bordell arbeiten lassen, damit sie für ihn Geld verdienten (Verse 449–464). Heinrich von Neustadt legt der verzweiferten Tarsia in ihrer Kammer folgendes Gebet (als dichterischen Zusatz) in den Mund: "vil hochgelobter Got, / Ich sten hie recht in dinem gepot: / Ich wayß doch wol das du pist gut. / Sich in mein hertz und in meyn müt / Und mercke in deiner Gothäit / Das mir alle poßhait / Ye und ye wider zam, / Seyt das ich synne zu mir nam. / Solt ichs mit gnaden sprechen: / Herre, was wiltu rechen / An mir armen dirnelein? / Herre, nu tue mir dein hilfße schein / Und lose mich von sender not / Oder sende mir den grymen dot! / Mein hertze leydet grossen sturm: / Nu wollte Got, wär ich ain wurm! So verpurg ich mich doch / Etswa in ain

<sup>45</sup> Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius*, Vers 15544.

<sup>46</sup> Leopold Stainreuter, *Österreichische Chronik von den 95 Herrschaften*, CVP 8462 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, fol. 7v–53r; hier fol. 45r; vgl. Johann Evangelist Schlager, *Wiener Skizzen aus dem Mittelalter* (Wien: C. Gerold, 1836, 1846), 2. Reihe, 345–46, Neue Folge 3 (o.O. [Wien]: A. Strauss's sel. Witwe et Sommer, 1846), 350–53. Für die Identifizierung des bei Schlager bezeichneten *Cod. hist. nova* Nr. 265 mit CVP 8462 danke ich ganz herzlich Herwig Weigl, Wien.

<sup>47</sup> Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius*, Vers 15582.

<sup>48</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 300v (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>49</sup> Hans Rosenplüt, in: Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 3, 1111; vgl. Johannes Müller, *Schwert und Scheide: Der sexuelle und skatologische Wortschatz im Nürnberger Fastnachtspiel des 15. Jahrhunderts*. Deutsche Literatur von den Anfängen bis 1700, 2 (Bern, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Paris und Wien: Peter Lang, 1988), 174–75.

<sup>50</sup> Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, 174; Michael Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, hg. Franz Lichtenstein. Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins, 163 (Tübingen: Laupp, 1883), 16.

<sup>51</sup> Die *Gedichte* Heinrichs des Teichners, hg. Heinrich Niewöhner (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953–1956), 3 Bände, hier Bd. 1, 122, Nr. 109, Vers 3; Bd. 1, 247, Nr. 222, Vers 17; Bd. 1, 286, Nr. 259, Vers 9; vgl. dazu Angelika Kölbl, *Der Blick auf die Frau. Frauendidaxe in den Reden Heinrichs des Teichners* (Wien: Präsens, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> *Liebesabenteuer in Konstanz*, 385, Verse 36 und 56.

<sup>53</sup> Irsigler und Lassotta, *Bettler und Gaukler*, 184; Schuster, *Frauenhaus*, 12, 77–85.

claines loch / Untz das mich der tod mich neme, / Das ich von schanden kame / Und von poshait verjagt: / So sturb ich doch ain raine magt" (Verse 15670–91).<sup>54</sup> Kaum hat sie dies geklagt, tritt der Fürst der Stadt ein. Sie reckt ihre Hände empor zu Gott und spricht: "herre, es stet nicht wol / Das man dein dirn lastern soll."<sup>55</sup> In Abb. 4 wird auch diese Ergänzung Heinrichs von Neustadt ziemlich exakt wiedergegeben.

Nachdem es der unfreiwilligen Prostituierten gelungen ist, ihre Jungfräulichkeit trotz zahlreicher Männerbesuche zu bewahren, schickt der Bordellwirt einen jungen Mann<sup>56</sup> zu ihr, mit dem Auftrag sie zu deflorieren, um sie gefügiger zu machen: "Wirt ain weyb gemachet sy, / So peleybet sy gerne pey mir hie / Und zeuhet die jungen man an sich: / so werden wir deß gutes reich."<sup>57</sup> (Verse 15810–13).

Bei diesem Auftrag handelt es sich um den Befehl zur Vergewaltigung. Auf Vergewaltigung standen schon in den frühen Stadtrechten hohe Strafen. Die Rechtspraxis ergab jedoch eine stark unterschiedliche Ahndung des Deliktes nach Alter und sozialem Status der Frauen. Trotz des Unterschieds im Strafausmaß war aber auch die Vergewaltigung von Prostituierten in jedem Fall strafwürdig.<sup>58</sup> Erstaunlicherweise gelingt es Tarsia, auch beim Verwalter Mitleid zu erwecken. Sie überredet ihn, ihr die Chance zu geben, am Marktplatz ihre Fähigkeiten zu präsentieren und damit Geld und ihre Freiheit zu erringen. Mit anderen Worten, Tarisa hat infolge ihrer guten Ausbildung die Möglichkeit, ihr Schicksal selbst in die Hand zu nehmen. Sie war in den "freien Künsten" ausgebildet und beherrscht das Spielen der Harfe: "So kann ich auff der herphen woll" (Vers 15859).<sup>59</sup> Die

<sup>54</sup> Vgl. dazu die Übertragung in Birkhan, *Apollonius*, 253: "Hochgelobter Gott, nach deinem Wunsche stehe ich hier: Und doch weiss ich, dass du gut bist. Sieh in mein Herz und meinen Sinn und merke in deiner Göttlichkeit, dass mir stets alles Böse, seit ich vernünftig handeln kann, zuwider war. Wenn ich mit deiner Gnade fragen darf: 'Herr, wofür strafst du mich armes Mädchen', so erzeige mir nun deiner Hilfe, Herr, und befreie mich aus dieser schmerzlichen Not oder lass mich sterben! Welcher Sturm tobt in meinem Herzen! Wollte Gott, dass ich ein kleines Ungeziefer wäre! So könnte ich mich etwa in einem kleinen Loch verbergen, bis der Tod mich hinwegrafft, nur damit mir die Schande und Schmach erspart bleibe und ich doch als reine Jungfrau stürbe."

<sup>55</sup> Vgl. dazu die Übertragung in Birkhan, *Apollonius*, 253: "Herr, es ist nicht recht, dass Deine Magd ins Laster gerät."

<sup>56</sup> 'Vilicus' in den *Gesta romanorum*, ed. Oesterly, 524, 21, 'gepuren' bei Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 302r (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008); 'paueren' in Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1476, 121r, (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/angustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008); 'seinen knecht' bei Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius*, Vers 15801.

<sup>57</sup> Vgl. dazu die Übertragung in Birkhan, *Apollonius*, 253: "Wird sie zu einer Frau gemacht, so bleibt sie um so lieber hier bei mir und zieht die jüngeren Männer an, was uns reich machen wird."

<sup>58</sup> Beate Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 60–61.

<sup>59</sup> Vgl. dazu die Stelle in den *Gesta romanorum*, ed. Oesterly, 524, 28–29, "Antwort Tarsia ich pin wol geübt auf singen und sprechen / darzü ein meisterin auf der harpfen / damit ich das gemüte des volckes wol bewegen wil zü geben. So pin ich auch der siblen künsten gelert. Für mich an den

nächste Federzeichnung bei Heinrich von Neustadt (Abb. 5) zeigt Tarsia auf einem mittelalterlichen Marktplatz, auf einer Holzbank sitzend, eine Harfe spielen. Stadtbewohner lauschen ihren Künsten, allen voran der Stadt- und Landesfürst im Redegestus, dahinter der Knecht Turpian mit Zeigegestus.

Tarsia ist es zwar gelungen, das Freudenhaus zeitweilig zu verlassen, die Freiheit hat sie aber trotz der hohen Geldeinnahmen nicht erlangen können. Als ein Fremder (eigentlich ihr Vater Apollonius) im Hafen landet, schickt der Stadt- und Landesherr nach dem Freudenmädchen, um den Unbekannten aufzuheitern (Abb. 6). In der *Gesta* (526, 29–32) und in der Version des Heinrich von Neustadt (Verse 16390–412) wird ihr dafür die Freilassung versprochen, in den beiden Inkunabeln von Steinhöwel eine große Geldsumme (304r und 126v–127r). Meines Erachtens spiegelt diese Erzählung die Reputation, welche die „freien Frauen“ im 15. Jahrhundert genossen. Die Häuser der „gemain Frawen“ sollten bei der Durchreise von Zelebritäten zum Empfang bereitgehalten werden, die Damen selbst wurden mit neuer Kleidung ausgestattet.<sup>60</sup>

Der Sänger Oswald von Wolkenstein (1376/1377–1445) berichtet z.B. von einer Einladung durch Adelige bei seiner Ankunft in München. In Gesellschaft schöner Frauen genießt er einen unterhaltsamen Abend bei Wein und Gesang (Kl. 41, Strophe 2).<sup>61</sup> Der Diplomat Sigismund von Herberstein (1486–1566) beschreibt in seiner Autobiographie den seinerzeit in Zürich praktizierten Brauch der Ehrung eines hochgestellten Gastes: Mit dem Bürgermeister, dem Gerichtsdieners und „gemainen Weibern“ aß er zu Abend.<sup>62</sup> Freudenmädchen wurden allenthalben zu Repräsentationsaufgaben herangezogen. Anlässlich des Einzugs König Albrechts II. in Wien im Jahre 1438 verzeichnen die Wiener Stadtrechnungen die Summe Geldes, um welche der Stadtrat den Frauen („gemain Frawen“) Wein kredenzte.<sup>63</sup>

Leopold Stainreuter überliefert in der *Österreichischen Chronik*, dass anlässlich des Einzugs seines Sohnes, des jungen König Ladislaus, im Jahre 1452 in Wien die Schönen Frauen gemeinsam mit den Handwerksfrauen ihm bis zum Wienerberg entgegen zogen (fol. 45r–46r, 49r).<sup>64</sup> Andreas von Lappitz schildert in seiner

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marckt so wil ich erzeÿgen wz ich kan.“ Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1476, 122r (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Schlager, *Wiener Skizzen*, Neue Folge III, 351–52; 379.

<sup>61</sup> Die *Lieder* Oswalds von Wolkenstein, ed. Karl Kurt Klein. Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 55 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962).

<sup>62</sup> *Johannes Tichtels Tagebuch*, *Sigmunds von Herberstein Selbstbiographie*, *Johann Cuspinians Tagebuch*, *Georg Kirchmairs Denkwürdigkeiten*, hg. Theodor von Karajan. *Fontes rerum austriacarum* (Wien: Kaiserlich, königliche Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1855, ND Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1969), Erste Abtheilung, Band 1, 102.

<sup>63</sup> Schlager, *Wiener Skizzen*, Neue Folge III, 351.

<sup>64</sup> Leopold Stainreuter, *Österreichische Chronik von den 95 Herrschaften*, CVP 8462 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, vgl. dazu Johann Evangelist Schlager, *Wiener Skizzen aus dem Mittelalter* (Wien: Gerold, 1836, 1846), 2. Reihe, 345–46, Neue Folge, III, 350–53.

Autobiografie den Empfang Friedrichs III. in Neapel. Die Städte waren herrlich geschmückt, auf den Plätzen waren Tische mit köstlichen Speisen und Getränken gedeckt; die Frauenhäuser waren geöffnet; die Frauen in den Frauenhäusern waren angehalten die Angehörigen des Hofes gratis zu bedienen, die Kosten übernahm der Hof ("Es waren in allen Stetten und Castellen wo wir darein zogen und lagen / lang Tafel khestlich auffgericht auff paiden Seyten am Platzen und khöstlich Prun mit Wein . . . Die Frawen-Hauß die waren bestellt / derfft khainekhain Pfening nicht nehmen . . . zallts alles von Hof / da fand ainer Mörin und sonst schöne Frawen was ain lustet" (65).<sup>65</sup>

Die hohe gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz der städtischen Freudenhäuser im 15. Jahrhundert ist durch zahlreiche Besuche hochgestellter Persönlichkeiten belegt. Als Kaiser Sigismund 1414 für einige Wochen in Bern residierte, hielt der Stadtrat die Gäste in Weinhäusern und im städtischen Bordell frei. In Augsburg offerierte man dem Kaiser und seinem Gefolge eine Nacht im Frauenhaus, und der Abend wurde mit Fackelzug und einer Festtafel begangen.<sup>66</sup>

Oswald von Wolkenstein hinterließ mit dem Lied "*Wer seines leids ergetzt well sein*" (Kl. 123) eine Reminiszenz an einen Freudenhausbesuch in Konstanz.<sup>67</sup> Die Mädchen sind hübsch und gut ausgebildet in den verschiedensten Disziplinen. Er berichtet von drei Mädchen mit denen er während seines Besuches in der "Weide" Kontakt hatte. Das erste Mädchen bedient ihn aufmerksam und freundlich, doch als er den verlangten Preis nicht bezahlen will, da er ihn für überhöht hält, bekommt er von einem zweiten Mädchen einen Faustschlag, worauf sich sein gesundes Auge infolge dieses zu stürmisch erhaltenen 'Gasttrunkes' verdunkelt und ihm der Mund tief herabhängt ("Das mir das besser aug verging./ wie ich die ertrünck zarg vervieng./ und meinen triel vast darum hineg./ dest e wurd ich zum

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<sup>65</sup> Johann Wilhelm Wurmbrand, *Collectanea genealogico-historica ex archivo inclitorum Austriae inferioris statuum ut ex aliis privatis scriniis documentisque originalibus excerpta* (Viennae: Joannis Baptist Schönwetter, 1705); neuhochdeutsche Übersetzung in: *Archiv für Geschichte, Statistik, Literatur und Kunst*, 7 (Wien: Ludwig, 1826), 521–23.

<sup>66</sup> Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 224–55; vgl. dazu Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. 15. Aufl. (1939; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), Bd. 1, 242; dagegen, wenngleich nicht überzeugend, Hans Peter Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*, 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1988), 301. Siehe auch den Beitrag zu diesem Band von Albrecht Classen ("Naked Men").

<sup>67</sup> Es ist einigermaßen skurril, dass das Konzil von Konstanz (1414–1418), welches einberufen wurde zur Reformierung der katholischen Kirche, die Gründung neuer Frauenhäuser förderte. Es wurde für die große Zahl der illegalen und legalen Prostituierten beinahe genauso bekannt. Die Chroniken Oberdeutschlands und der Schweiz schreiben von 700 Prostituierten, die durch das Konzil in die Stadt Konstanz gelockt wurden, um dort ihrem Gewerbe nachzugehen (Schuster, *Die unendlichen Frauen*, 19–30).

toren.<sup>68</sup> Else and Elli verbünden sich gegen den Gast Oswald und versuchen mit vereinten Kräften, ihre Forderungen durchzusetzen. Ein drittes Mädchen missfällt Oswald wegen seines arroganten Benehmens, sie wartet auf noblere, schönere und spendablere Männer und zeigt ihm die kalte Schulter.<sup>69</sup>

Die Mädchen erhalten Unterstützung vom Bordellbetreiber, einem Mann mit rüdem Umgangston, dessen Gastfreundschaft weit von seiner Geldgier übertroffen wird. Oswalds Lied endet mit einer Klage über die Zustände in Konstanz. Der Dichter äußert jedoch keine Kritik an der Sittenlosigkeit, er entrüstet sich lediglich über die hohen Preise in Konstanz, denn diese seien durch die vielen reichen Fremden hochgeschwemmt, wie auch Eberhart von Windecke in seinem Lied *Vom Concil* klagt.<sup>70</sup>

Die vom Dichter Oswald von Wolkenstein geschilderten Erlebnisse im Bordell scheinen zumindest teilweise vom Meister der Bandrollen (um 1460/1470) geteilt worden zu sein (Abb. 7). Der Kupferstich zeigt einen geschmackvoll ausgestatteten Innenraum mit Fliesenboden und Glasfenstern. Auf einem kunstvollen Tisch stehen Trinkgefäße. Davor auf einer Bank sitzt ein reich gekleideter junger Mann, der sich mit einem Freudenmädchen vergnügt. Neben dem Paar steht eine weitere beinahe unbekleidete Person mit dem Spruchband in der Rechten: *“Inspicite hic allectiua iuve(n)tutis”* (Seht hier die Verlockung der Jugend).

Die Gruppe vervollständigt links außen ein sie betrachtender Narr mit Schellenkleid, Eselsohrenkappe und Marotte. Er macht beim Anblick des unzüchtigen Treibens eine für ihn typische Bewegung mit der rechten Hand, indem er durch die Finger sieht, was den damaligen Rezipienten stillschweigendes Einverständnis mit dem kritikwürdigen Vorgang signalisierte.<sup>71</sup> Er symbolisiert damit die Position der Zeitgenossen, den Frauenhausbesuch jungen Männern zuzugestehen, denn Adoleszenz war die Zeit des Sammelns sexueller Erfahrungen. Oswald war während seines Aufenthaltes in Konstanz tatsächlich noch unvermählt.

Die Prostituierten werden nicht nur als attraktive, charmante, fröhliche und hübsche junge Mädchen gezeichnet,<sup>72</sup> sondern auch als ehrgeizige, eifersüchtige,

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<sup>68</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder*, Kl. 123; vgl. Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Sämtliche Lieder und Gedichte*, ins Neuhochdeutsche übersetzt von Wernfried Hofmeister. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 511 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1989), 349.

<sup>69</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder*, Kl. 123.

<sup>70</sup> Eberhart Windecke: *Vom Concil*, abgedruckt in: Rochus von Liliencron, *Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert*, 2 Bände, (1865–1866; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), 264–65.

<sup>71</sup> Werner Mezger, *Narrenidee und Fastnachtsbrauch*. Studien zum Fortleben des Mittelalters in der europäischen Festkultur (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1991), 159.

<sup>72</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder* Kl. 54; François Villon, *Sämtliche Dichtungen*, hg. mit deutscher Übertragung Walther Küchler (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1962), 60–67.

standesbewusste, launische Geschöpfe;<sup>73</sup> Geld spielt für sie auf jeden Fall eine große Rolle.<sup>74</sup>

#### 4. Organisation und Leitung der Frauenhäuser<sup>75</sup>

Freudenhäuser wurden von Frauen ('frawn wirtin',<sup>76</sup> 'meisterin der wib'<sup>77</sup>) oder Männern ('frauenwirt',<sup>78</sup> 'huorenwirt',<sup>79</sup> 'Riffian und obrester maïser der offen sünderin, der ouch raich und mächtig worden was von den sünderin',<sup>80</sup> 'rüffian'<sup>81</sup>) geleitet, mitunter von einem Ehepaar.<sup>82</sup> 'Puliân' (von mhd. 'Buol') ist ein Wiener Ausdruck aus der Prostituiertenszene, auch Heinrich der Teichner hat ihn in seinem Wortschatz.<sup>83</sup>

Der Leiter hatte die Pflicht, die Mädchen zu schützen, aber die zahlreichen historischen Quellen gewähren Einblicke in einen grausamen Alltag dieser Frauen. Die Frauenwirte werden durchwegs als geldgierig,<sup>84</sup> geizig<sup>85</sup> und brutal<sup>86</sup> charakterisiert.

Auch der Frauenwirt in der Apolloniustradition wird als unangenehmer Kerl, als ein typischer Vertreter seines Standes vorgeführt. In sämtlichen Varianten der Erzählung delegiert er die durch die kluge Königstochter erfolgreich vermiedene

<sup>73</sup> Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, Bd. 2, 263, Nr. 457, Verse 6–23.

<sup>74</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 321, Nr. 42, Verse 24–27; *Liebesabenteuer in Konstanz*, 384–87, Nr. 45.

<sup>75</sup> Irsigler und Lassotta, *Bettler und Gaukler*, 180–93; Schuster, *Frauenhaus*, 57–121; Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 80–158.

<sup>76</sup> Gerhard Jaritz, "Die "armen Leute" im Spital. Zur Aussage der Kremser Spitalmeisterrechnungen aus den Jahren 1459–1461," *Mitteilungen des Kremser Stadtarchivs*, 21/22 (1982), 36; zum Jahr 1460/61 sind die Einnahmen der Frauenwirtin verzeichnet. Der Wert von 25 Pfennig entspricht in etwa dem Tageslohn eines Hilfsarbeiters.

<sup>77</sup> Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, Bd. 3, 121, Nr. 584, Vers 5.

<sup>78</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 2, 689, Nr. 83, Vers 11.

<sup>79</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 2, 866, Nr. 110, Verse 7 und 21.

<sup>80</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 301r (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>81</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1476, 117r (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>82</sup> Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 106.

<sup>83</sup> Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius*, Vers 15544; Birkhan, *Apollonius*, 359, A 323; Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, Bd. 1, 187, Nr. 166, Vers 19; Bd. 2, 269, Nr. 461, Vers 146.

<sup>84</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 301r (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>85</sup> Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, Bd. 3, 121, Nr. 584, Vers 18.

<sup>86</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder* Kl. 123, 3.

Deflorierung an den Bordelldiener. War er Kastrat, weil er diese Aufgabe an den Knecht abtrat, anstatt Tarsia selbst die Unschuld zu rauben?<sup>87</sup>

Anders als in den historischen Quellen überliefert, wird der Frauenwirt in der fiktionalen Realität des Romans bestraft und seiner gerechten Strafe zugeführt; die Mädchen werden befreit. König Apollonius und seine Tochter halten unter Beteiligung der Bevölkerung Gericht über den Bordellbesitzer, der zum Tode verurteilt und bei lebendigem Leibe verbrannt wird.<sup>88</sup> „Der pulian werde verprant / Vor unnseren augen hie zehant“ (Vers 16960–61). Dem Wiener und dem Gothaer Überlieferungsträger von Heinrichs von Neustadt Bearbeitung verdanken wir die bildliche Darstellung des Frauenwirtes und des Dieners (b 114, fol. 131v, c99, fol. 106r).<sup>89</sup> Die Federzeichnung der Wiener Handschrift (Abb. 8) zeigt im Zentrum den Zuhälter auf einem brennenden Scheiterhaufen mit gekreuzten Beinen an einen Baum gefesselt. Zwei Folterknechte, von denen der linke einem Narren ähnelt, quälen ihn.

Der Gehilfe des Frauenwirtes (Knecht,<sup>90</sup> *‘huorenwirts knecht,’*<sup>91</sup> *‘der weybe knecht,’*<sup>92</sup> *‘pflegere,’*<sup>93</sup> *‘villicus’*<sup>94</sup>) wird in den Apolloniusromanen positiv gezeichnet. Er hat Mitleid mit dem armen Mädchen Tarsia, und seiner Courage verdankt es seine Befreiung. Denn entgegen dem Befehl seines Herrn vergewaltigt er es nicht, sondern verhilft ihm zu dem öffentlichen Auftritt auf dem Marktplatz, wodurch es Gelegenheit hat, der Bevölkerung sein Schicksal zu erzählen und die Machenschaften des Bordellwirtes offen zu legen: „Do sprach der paur. ob (122r) ich das gern thett so ist dein meister so giffitig auf das güt. wann er hat dich umb gewynnes willen gekaufft. doch westest du ander weg gelt zû gewynnen so wölt ich dir hilfflich seÿn.“<sup>95</sup>

Auch über den Gehilfen wird Gericht gehalten, aber er wird für seine tugendhafte Einstellung gelobt und erhält eine Belohnung für sein hilfreiches Verhalten: „Do berüffet Tarsia den pauen dem bevolhen was sÿ zû fellen und

<sup>87</sup> Birkhan, *Apollonius*, 360, A 329.

<sup>88</sup> *Gesta romanorum*, ed. Trillitzsch, 345; Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 307v (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008); Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1476, 134r/v (siehe die online Version: <http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008); Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius*, Verse 16912–95.

<sup>89</sup> Schultz-Balluff, *Dispositio picta – Dispositio imaginum*, 281.

<sup>90</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 301r (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).

<sup>91</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele* Bd. 2, 866, Nr. 110, Verse 7 und 21.

<sup>92</sup> Heinrich von Neustadt, *Apollonius*, Vers 15636.

<sup>93</sup> Heinrich, *Apollonius*, Vers 15625.

<sup>94</sup> *Gesta romanorum*, ed. Oesterly, 524, 21.

<sup>95</sup> Steinhöwel, *Apollonius*, 1471, 122r (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008).



sprach zû im. ich gib dir freiheÿt. wann durch dein gûtikeyt pin ich magt beliben und schencket im zweÿhundert stuck goldes. und freÿet alle die diernen die in dem hauß der sünden waren darein sÿ wz verkaufft“ (135r). Die Prostituierten werden alle freigelassen.

Die Federzeichnung in c100, fol. 106<sup>96</sup> (Abb. 9) bietet ebenfalls diese Gerichtsszene. Im Zentrum des Bildes stehen Tarsia und ihr Vater, König Apollonius, dahinter eine Gruppe Stadtbewohner. Der Illustrator scheint einen Versuch des Zuhälters anzudeuten, den Gehilfen mit ins Verderben zu reißen, denn er hält Turpian am Arm, zieht ihn an sich und weist mit der rechten Hand auf ihn.

In den *Fastnachtspielen des 15. Jahrhunderts* scheint die Defloration der Mädchen zum Aufgabenbereich des Dieners (‘huorenwirts kneht’)<sup>97</sup> zu zählen, außerdem musste er Wäsche waschen, Essen und Getränke bringen.<sup>98</sup> Auch hier wird er durchwegs als Komplize der Mädchen dargestellt.

## 5. Illegale Frauenhäuser

Illegale Freudenhäuser und “freischaffende” Prostituierte gab es nicht nur in den Städten. Nach dem uns in den literarischen Quellen vermittelten Bild waren die selbständigen Huren vor allem für die Gebiete außerhalb der städtischen Gemeinschaften zuständig.

Professionelle Prostituierte betrachteten freilich die illegalen und semiprofessionellen Dirnen, die “freien” Huren, die nicht in Frauenhäusern lebten,<sup>99</sup> als Konkurrenz, insbesondere in Bezug auf ihr Einkommen.<sup>100</sup> Im Mittelalter war es verheirateten Männern untersagt, Freudenhäuser zu besuchen,<sup>101</sup> daher dürfte die Nachfrage nach illegalen “sex workers” groß gewesen sein. So ist bekannt, dass Freudenhäuser die wichtige Funktion ausübten, die sexuellen Bedürfnisse der unverheirateten Männer zu kanalisieren; die mittelalterliche Gesellschaft sah in der Institutionalisierung der Freudenhäuser einen Schutz für Mädchen und Frauen. Die städtischen Freudenhäuser mussten

<sup>96</sup> Der Gothaer Codex bietet die Szene als kolorierte Federzeichnung (b115, fol. 132r) Schultz-Balluff, *Dispositio picta – Dispositio imaginum*, 282.

<sup>97</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 2, 866, Nr. 110, Verse 7 und 21.

<sup>98</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 158, Nr. 18, Verse 22–26.

<sup>99</sup> Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, 174; Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 3, 1111.

<sup>100</sup> Vgl. Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 168.

<sup>101</sup> Beate Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 126–27; Schuster, *Frauenhaus*, 114–15.

Steuern bezahlen, einer der Gründe dafür, dass die dort geleisteten Dienste teurer waren als die durch illegale Prostituierte angebotenen.

Die Randlage der illegalen Frauenhäuser innerhalb der Städte wird auch in den literarischen Quellen angesprochen, etwa vom Dichter Otte in seinem *Eraclius* (13. Jahrhundert), der bei seiner mittelhochdeutschen Bearbeitung des Stoffes das städtische Publikum Regensburgs oder Wiens vor Augen hatte. Er lässt *Eraclius* ein Mädchen in einem städtischen Armenviertel suchen und steht schließlich vor einem jämmerlichen, mit Schindeln und Stroh gedeckten Holzhaus, dessen Stützen und Wände verfault sind (*“Unz sie in eine haus gie / Daz was nider und niht hoch / Mit schindlin gedaht und mit stro / Der zoun der wende der was foul / Enmitten stünt eine chrumbiu soul / Diu was des swachen hauses kraft / Die raven (Sparren) waren dar an gehaft“* (A, Verse 2246–52).<sup>102</sup> Als er eine Alte nach dem Mädchen fragt und sie seine Frage als Suche nach einem Liebesabenteuer interpretiert, meint sie, es gäbe viele andere Mädchen in dieser armseligen Gegend, die sehr billig zu haben wären (*“ir mügte hie manig vinden / Diu iuch iwers willen wert / Und wan drier pfenning gert / ir vaele ist nie so dunne / Sie ensie von dem“* (A Verse 2260–73).

KupplerInnen agierten, wie auch heute noch, als Vermittler zwischen den Mädchen und den Klienten. In den literarischen Quellen sind sie fast immer weiblich, alt und hässlich, schmierig, materialistisch und dubios beschrieben.<sup>103</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein lässt in einem Streitgedicht eines Bürgers und eines Höflings eine alte Kupplerin und ehemalige Dirne (*‘alte diern’*) ausführlich zu Wort kommen und sie die Partei des Bürgers ergreifen.<sup>104</sup> Sie wird als *‘alte keue’* (alte Kupplerin), *‘alte kammer zitze’* (alte Zitzenmutter) und schließlich als *‘alter, böser sack’* (alter, gemeiner Sack) bezeichnet (Kl. 25 und Kl. 102). Die Erzählung wird von der Oswaldforschung als sehr realistisch eingestuft.<sup>105</sup> Kupplerinnen

<sup>102</sup> Meister Otte, *Eraclius*, hg. Winfried Frey. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 348 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1983).

<sup>103</sup> Fischer, *Die deutsche Märendichtung*, 109–11; Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 144–45; François Villon, *Sämtliche Dichtungen*, 60–67; Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 96, Nr. 9, Verse 9–22, Bd. 2, 866, Nr. 110, Verse 21–37; vgl. dazu Gretchen Mieszkowski, *“Old Age and Medieval Misogyny,” Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, hg. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 2 (Berlin und New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 299–319.

<sup>104</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Sämtliche Lieder und Gedichte*, übersetzt Hofmeister, 95–99; Werner Marold, *Kommentar zu den Liedern Oswalds*, bearbeitet und herausgegeben von Alan Robertshaw (Innsbruck: Institut für Germanistik, 1995), 88–91.

<sup>105</sup> Marold, *Kommentar zu den Liedern Oswalds*, 88–91; Johannes Spicker, *Oswald von Wolkenstein: Die Lieder*. *Klassiker-Lektüren*, 10 (Berlin: Schmidt, 2007), hat fast nichts zu diesem Lied oder Thema zu sagen, obwohl er doch mit seiner Arbeit eine Art Gesamtinterpretation anstrebt. Siehe aber die Einleitung zum vorliegenden Band von Albrecht Classen.

waren häufig selbst früher Dirnen und wurden von Männern und Frauen um ihre Dienste gebeten. Vor allem Angehörige höheren Standes zählen – um Diskretion bemüht – zu ihren Kunden.<sup>106</sup>

Zuhälter finden aber bemerkenswerterweise in der deutschen Literatur kaum Erwähnung. Lediglich im *Spil von dreien Brudern, die rechtent vor eim Konig umb ein Mul, Pock und umb ein Paum* wird ein Mann als 'hurntreiber' verunglimpft.<sup>107</sup> François Villon dagegen erzählt in dem berühmten Lied *Ballade de Villon et de la Grosse Margot* von seiner realen oder fiktiven Zuhältereier:

Se j'ayme et sers la belle de bon hait,  
 M'en devez vous tenir ne vil ne sot? . . .  
 Quant viennent gens, je cours et happe ung pot,  
 Au vin m'en fuis, sans demener grant bruit;  
 Je leur tens eaue, frommage, pain et fruit.  
 S'ilz paient bien, je leur dis: "Bene stat;  
 Retournez cy, quant vous serez en ruit,  
 En ce bordeau ou tenons nostre estat!"

[Wenn ich der Schönen dien in Lieb und Lust,  
 Dürft ihr mich halten drum für schlecht und dumm? . . .  
 Wenn Leute kommen, laufe ich herum  
 Für einen Krug voll Wein, ohn viel zu schrein.  
 Bring Wasser, Käse, Früchte, Brot herein,  
 Und zahlen gut sie, sag ich: Bene stat,  
 Kommt wieder, wenn Ihr seid in brünstiger Pein,  
 In dies Bordell, wo unsre Lust sich hat."] <sup>108</sup>

Die illegalen Prostituierten sind Mädchen und Frauen aus allen Ständen. Den weitaus überwiegenden Anteil stellen Ehefrauen und Witwen.<sup>109</sup> Auch sie werden

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<sup>106</sup> Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 144–45; Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder* Kl. 102; Georg Wickram, *Rollwagenbüchlein*, hg. Johannes Bolte, *Werke*, 3. Band. Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins, 229 (Tübingen: Laupp, 1903), 140–41.

<sup>107</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 89, Nr. 8, Verse 9–10.

<sup>108</sup> Villon, *Sämtliche Dichtungen*, 142–45.

<sup>109</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 2, 746–50, Nr. 97.

von den männlichen Autoren als geldgierig,<sup>110</sup> geizig,<sup>111</sup> unloyal,<sup>112</sup> unersättlich,<sup>113</sup> streitsüchtig<sup>114</sup> und diebisch<sup>115</sup> bezeichnet. In dieser Gruppe finden wir auch alternde Frauen.<sup>116</sup> Als sie kennzeichnende Namen treten auf 'hür,<sup>117</sup> 'gemainew vraw,<sup>118</sup> 'diern,<sup>119</sup> 'Körblinsmeid,<sup>120</sup> 'winckelweyber<sup>121</sup> oder derber 'winkelsack.<sup>122</sup> Berthold von Regensburg meint, sie hätten durch ihre Tätigkeit die Bezeichnung Frau verwirkt und sollten 'böese hiute' genannt werden ("Und diu gemeinen fröuwelîn, sie heizent aber niht fröuwelîn, wan sie habent frouwennamen verlorn und wir heizen sie die böesen hiute ûf dem graben . . .").<sup>123</sup>

Private Wohnhäuser sind die häufigsten Orte illegaler Prostitution. In der didaktischen Literatur, in Mären und in Schwänken wird oft erzählt, wie eine wohl gehütete Ehefrau, die ihren Ehemann überlisten will, ein Abenteuer anbahnen konnte: Die Frau wartet am Fenster, bis ein geeigneter Kandidat vorbeigeht und nimmt mit diesem Blickkontakt auf. Mit der entsprechenden Mimik und Gestik wird ein Treffen vereinbart.<sup>124</sup> Solche Frauen wurden im

<sup>110</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 321, Nr. 42, Vers 26; Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder* Kl. 102; Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, Bd. 2, 194, Nr. 419, Verse 139–43; Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 14–16; 46–49; 8; Giovanni Boccaccio, *Das Dekameron*. Mit 110 Holzschnitten der italienischen Ausgabe von 1492, deutsch von Albert Wesselski (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Taschenbuch, 1974), 2 Bände, hier Bd. 2, 663–70 (Dritter Tag, sechste Geschichte); *Liederbuch der Clara Hätzlerin*, hg. Carl Haltaus. Bibliothek der gesamten deutschen National-Literatur, 8 (Quedlinburg, Leipzig: Gottfried Basse, 1840) neu hg. mit Nachwort von Hanns Fischer. Deutsche Neudrucke, Reihe: Texte des Mittelalters (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1966), 305–08; Wickram, *Rollwagenbüchlein*, 140–41.

<sup>111</sup> Heinrich Kaufringer, *Werke*, hg. Paul Sappeler (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1972), 53–72, Nr. 5.

<sup>112</sup> *Liebesabenteuer in Konstanz*, 384–87.

<sup>113</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 340, Nr. 44, Verse 1–21; Bd. 1, 340, Nr. 44, Verse 22–34; Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 76–77, bringt eine Erzählung über eine Adelige, die "den halben theyl irer güter verhurt[e]"; siehe auch *Liederbuch der Clara Hätzlerin*, 305–08.

<sup>114</sup> Villon, *Sämtliche Dichtungen*, 142–45.

<sup>115</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 339, Nr. 44, Verse 20–33; *Liederbuch der Clara Hätzlerin*, 305–08.

<sup>116</sup> Villon, *Sämtliche Dichtungen*, 61–65; Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 340, Nr. 44, Verse 23–34.

<sup>117</sup> Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 76.

<sup>118</sup> Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, Bd. 2, 117, Nr. 365, Verse 36–61; Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 8–13.

<sup>119</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder*, Kl. 25, 1–4; Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 21, 144.

<sup>120</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 2, 793, Nr. 105, Vers 19; Bd. 1, 376, Nr. 50, Vers 26.

<sup>121</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 3, 1111.

<sup>122</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 2, 852, Nr. 108, Vers 26.

<sup>123</sup> Berthold von Regensburg, *Predigten*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer, mit einem Vorwort neu hg. Kurt Ruh. Deutsche Neudrucke, Reihe: Texte des Mittelalters (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), Bd. 2, 148, 33–35.

<sup>124</sup> Kaufringer, *Werke*, 41–52, Nr. 4 aber auch 81–91, Nr. 7; vgl. dazu die Verführungspraktiken, die eine erfahrene Mutter ihrer Tochter beibringt: *Liederbuch der Clara Hätzlerin*, 305–08; Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Ich trüg auch ledig siben chind: Zur sozialen Konstruktion von Weiblichkeit in der

Österreich des 14. Jahrhunderts Fensterhennen ('vensterhenne') genannt.<sup>125</sup>

Manche Frauen waren wohl geschminkt,<sup>126</sup> die meisten wahrscheinlich schön, vielleicht verführerisch gekleidet. Mitunter ist Gelderwerb nicht das dominierende Motiv, denn so manche Ehefrau begehrte mehr als einen Mann, wie der Teichner, vielleicht ein Zeitgenosse Heinrichs von Neustadt, kommentiert. In vielen Kurzgeschichten männlicher Autoren werden Ehefrauen ironisch als Opfer ihrer sexuellen Begierden gezeigt. Sie ergreifen jede sich ihnen bietende Gelegenheit, ihre Bedürfnisse zu befriedigen. Geschildert werden Priester,<sup>127</sup> Mönche,<sup>128</sup> Studenten,<sup>129</sup> die mehr oder weniger zufällig, das Haus betreten, Bauern, die ihre Produkte zum Kauf anbieten<sup>130</sup> oder abliefern, etc.

Der didaktische Dichter Heinrich der Teichner behauptet, manch armer Mann in Wien würde seine Frau an andere Männer, auch Geistliche, "vermieten" ("man vindet vil mangeln swachen, der umb pfenning layen und pfaffen / let bei seinem weib slaffen").<sup>131</sup> Relativ selten hingegen werden in der deutschsprachigen Literatur Beziehungen zwischen dem Hausherrn und weiblichen Bediensteten thematisiert.<sup>132</sup>

Dem Badevergnügen wird in erotischen Situationen seit alters hoher Stellenwert beigemessen. Jedoch sind nur wenige literarische Schilderungen zum Themenbereich Erotik und Wasser überliefert. Die mittelhochdeutsche Literatur des 14. Jahrhunderts besitzt mit Oswalds von Wolkenstein Lied *Wol auff, wol an* (Kl. 75) ein singuläres lyrisches Produkt, dass dieses Amusement allerdings im privaten Umfeld, fern vom Bordellbetrieb beschreibt.<sup>133</sup> Im Rahmen der stimmungsvollen Schilderung über die wiedererwachende Natur fängt er die prickelnde Sinnenfreude des Badevergnügens zur Einleitung einer Verführungsszene ein. Er besingt die fröhliche, ausgelassene Badeszene mit seiner frisch vermählten Frau Margarete von Schwangau auf ihrer Burg Hauenstein. In

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Minnerede Stiefmutter und Tochter," *Fremdes wahrnehmen – fremdes Wahrnehmen: Studien zur Geschichte der Wahrnehmung und zur Begegnung von Kulturen in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, hg. Wolfgang Harms und C. Stephen Jaeger (Stuttgart und Leipzig: Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1997), 193–204.

<sup>125</sup> Seifried Helbling, hg. Joseph Seemüller (Halle a. Saale: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1886), Buch I, Verse 1292–341, 63.

<sup>126</sup> Seifried Helbling, Buch I, Verse 1146–52, 58.

<sup>127</sup> Kaufringer, *Werke*, 38, Nr. 3, Vers 639, u.ö.

<sup>128</sup> Kaufringer, *Werke*, 105, Nr. 9, Vers 1, u.ö.; Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 24–27.

<sup>129</sup> Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 8–13; 18, u.ö.

<sup>130</sup> *Die Facetien des Florentiners Poggio* (o.O: Faber&Faber, o.J.), Fac. 69.

<sup>131</sup> Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, Bd. 3, 32–33, Nr. 563, Verse 10–12.

<sup>132</sup> Wickram, *Rollwagenbüchlein*, 11; dagegen: Poggio, Fac. 85, Fac. 222.

<sup>133</sup> Vgl. dazu Albrecht Classen "Liebesehe und Ehelieder in den Gedichten Oswalds von Wolkenstein," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein-Gesellschaft*, Bd. 5 (1988/89): 445–64.

der ergrünenden Mailandschaft ergötzt sich das verliebte Paar lustvoll im Bad, Details des zärtlichen Minnegeschehens werden farbenfroh ausgemalt: "in das Bädli, / Ösli, Gredli! . . . wascha, maidli, / mir das schaidli! Reib mich, knäblin, / umb das näblin! / hilfst du mir, / leicht vach ich dir das retzli."<sup>134</sup> Es ist daher kaum verwunderlich, dass Zeitgenossen in manchen Badehäusern illegale Freudenhäuser vermuteten, wo nicht nur Liebende ihrer Leidenschaft frönen konnten,<sup>135</sup> Huren ihre Arbeit anboten, sondern auch der Bader und seine weiblichen und männlichen Assistenten sexuelle Dienstleistungen gewährten.<sup>136</sup> Der anonyme Autor der Lehrdichtung *Des Teufels Netz* (um 1414–1418) behauptet in dem Kapitel *Von Badern und Lassern* (Verse 10277–91), der Bader und sein Gesinde wären häufig Huren, Buben und Kuppler, die alle Kundenwünsche zufrieden stellen könnten.<sup>137</sup>

In Anbetracht der Autorenintentionen sind dies sicherlich grobe Übertreibungen und Verzerrungen, bestand doch das Ziel der Verfasser darin, die Zuseher zu unterhalten, zu belehren und auf den rechten Weg zu führen. Dennoch gewahren wir kleine Genreszenen vom mittelalterlichen Badeleben, die mehr oder weniger die mittelalterliche Realität wiedergeben, weil die Autoren vorstellbare Szenen schildern, denn andernfalls hätte die didaktische Intention keine Wirkung. Auch im sog. Hausbuch (Abb. 10) wird ein typisches Badehaus wiedergegeben. Wir sehen ein großzügig ausgeführtes Gebäude inmitten eines ummauerten Gartens, in dem sich Paare lustwandelnd und unterhaltend aufhalten. Der Maler gewährt dem Betrachter ebenfalls Einblicke in das Badehaus. Im Erdgeschoß baden Frauen und Männer gemeinsam; sie sind nackt bis auf eine Kopfbedeckung. Am Rundbogenfenster sitzt ein Lautenspieler. Vor dem Bad wartet ein Diener mit bereitgestellten Getränken. Im ersten Stock sind ein junger Mann und eine junge Frau sichtbar.

<sup>134</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder*, Kl. 75; Spicker, *Oswald von Wolkenstein*, 54–57, verspottet die gesamte Forschung, die diese Aussagen mehr oder weniger wörtlich genommen hat, versagt aber völlig darin, eine überzeugende Gegenposition zu beziehen. Zu dem Thema vgl. auch Kaufinger, *Werke*, 41–52, Nr. 4; 105–11, Nr. 9.

<sup>135</sup> Boccaccio, *Das Dekameron*, hier 1, 274–84;

<sup>136</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele* Bd. 1, 377, Nr. 50, Verse 13–25; Bd. 2, 689, Nr. 83, Verse 11–12; vgl. dazu Merry E. Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 95–96; Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 218–20; dagegen: Schuster, *Frauenhaus*, 129–33; Sonia Horn, "Seelen-Bad, Körperreinigung und Badstuben in der mittelalterlichen Stadt," *Umwelt Stadt, Geschichte des Natur- und Lebensraumes Wien*, hg. von Karl Brunner und Petra Schneider (Wien, Köln und Weimar: Böhlau, 2005) 244–48; Duerr, *Nacktheit und Scham*, 38–58.

<sup>137</sup> *Des Teufels Netz*. Satirisch-didaktisches Gedicht aus der ersten Hälfte des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts, hg. Karl August Barack. Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins, 70 (Stuttgart: Laupp, 1883), 322–26; vgl. dazu Karin Lerchner, "Des Teufels Netz," *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexikon*, Bd. 9 (Berlin und New York: de Gruyter, 1995), 723–27.

Als weitere Orte der Prostitution treten sodann Gasthäuser<sup>138</sup> in den literarischen Quellen in Erscheinung.<sup>139</sup> Der so genannte Winkelwirt führt das Wirtshaus, das als Deckmantel für ein verkapptes Bordell dient.<sup>140</sup> In einigen Liedern vermittelt uns Oswald von Wolkenstein Impressionen vom Leben in einer derartigen Schenke. Die Themen sind: Wein, Weib und Gesang.<sup>141</sup> Gastwirte werden in der Literatur mitunter sogar beschuldigt, ihre eigenen Frauen anzubieten.<sup>142</sup>

Straßen und Plätze boten als Orte der Kommunikation harmlose und unverfängliche Anknüpfungspunkte für die gesamte Gemeinde und für Fremde.<sup>143</sup> Wieder vermitteln die Schwänke Einblicke in die Möglichkeiten, die ein mittelalterlicher Dorf- und Stadtbewohner hatte, an das gewünschte Ziel zu gelangen.<sup>144</sup> Die Reisebeschreibung Arnolds von Harff bietet nicht nur interessante Schilderungen der verschiedenen von ihm besuchten Völker und Länder Südeuropas und des Orients. Sie enthält auch mehr als zwei Dutzend zweisprachige Wort- und Satzlisten sowie Schriftzeichentafeln. Die Sprachproben enthalten elementare Vokabeln des Grundwortschatzes, einfache Sätze wie "Wo ist die nächste Herberge" und den öfter wiederkehrenden Satz "Schöne Frau, ich bin überall in der Fremde allein; lasst mich heute nacht bei Euch schlafen!"<sup>145</sup>

Die wenigsten Erwähnungen finden fahrende Dirnen in der spätmittelhochdeutschen und frühneuhochdeutschen Literatur.<sup>146</sup> In Lied Kl. 102 schildert Oswalds eine köstliche Szene, eingefädelt von der Kupplerin, einem *alten weib*, die einen Mann namens Hans Maler, als er in Brixen bei ihrem Haus vorbeireitet, zu sich winkt und mit einem Mädchen verkuppelt. Oswald bedient sich bei dieser amüsanten Erzählung der ersten Person Singular, so dass der Interpret in Hans

<sup>138</sup> Grundlegend zum Gasthaus im Mittelalter: *Gastfreundschaft, Taverne und Gasthaus im Mittelalter*, hg. Hans Conrad Peyer. Schriften des Historischen Kollegs. Kolloquien, 3 (München und Wien: Oldenbourg, 1983).

<sup>139</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 91–110, 31, Nr. 9; Bd. 1, 337, Nr. 44, Verse 1–15; Bd. 2, 793, Nr. 105, Verse 16–20; Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder*, Kl. 54, Kl. 70, Kl. 72.

<sup>140</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele* 1, 110, 31–111, 3; Müller, *Schwert und Scheide*, 176.

<sup>141</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder* Kl. 54 und *Lieder* Kl. 70.

<sup>142</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 303, Nr. 39, Verse 10–15.

<sup>143</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 339, Nr. 44, Verse 20–33; Bd. 2, 623, Nr. 71, Verse 1–5.

<sup>144</sup> Keller, *Fastnachtspiele*, Bd. 1, 36, Nr. 2, Verse 1–3; Lindener, *Rastbüchlein und Katzipori*, 21–22.

<sup>145</sup> Hartmut Beckers, "Die Reisebeschreibung Arnolds von Harff," *Deutsche Jakobspilger und ihre Berichte*, ed. Klaus Herbers. Jakobs-Studien, 1 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1988), 51–60. Für diesen Hinweis danke ich ganz herzlich Thomas Szabó, Göttingen. Im Griechischen heißt dies bei Harff folgendermaßen: "kyrasche nazis gymati meto sena" bzw. "goede frauwe laist mich bij uch slaeffen," 76; im Arabischen hingegen: "marrat nycō" bzw. "frauwe sal ich by dir slaeffen," 112; *Die Pilgerfahrt des Ritters Arnold von Haarff*. . . . Nach den ältesten Handschriften hg. von E. von Groote (Köln: J. M. Heberle, 1860).

<sup>146</sup> Schuster; *Die unendlichen Frauen*, 37–53; Schuster, *Die freien Frauen*, 37–53, Heinrich der Teichner, *Gedichte*, Bd. 2, 353, Nr. 501, Verse 63–65.

Maler die Allegorie des (mittlerweile verheirateten) Dichters vermutet. Oswald führt den komödiantischen Bericht fort, indem er seine Freude über dieses verlockende Abenteuer zum Ausdruck bringt ("Mein herz ward freuden vol / und gailt sich dieser märe" V. 29–30). Seine Hochstimmung währt nicht lange, denn er tappt in eine Falle. Während seines Besuches bei dem Mädchen wird der Ich-Erzähler von vier Männern überfallen, misshandelt und ausgeraubt. Er kann dieser Übermacht kaum Widerstand leisten und reitet niedergeschlagen auf seine Burg zurück. Die Folgen seiner "Behandlung" waren auch am nächsten Tag noch sichtbar, weshalb er seinen Fehltritt nicht verheimlichen kann. Schließlich bekommt der überfallene Freier Probleme mit seiner Ehefrau ("ain grossen krieg . . . mit meinem weib," V. 41–42). Am Rande sei noch bemerkt, dass der Autor die Erzählung seines missglückten Unternehmens mit einer Verwünschung der alten Kupplerin beschließt, weil er ihr Schuld am Ausgang seiner missglückten Eskapade zuschreibt. Den historischen Hintergrund dieses Berichtes dürften die periodisch stattfindenden Handelsfahrten ungarischer Jahrmaktfahrer in Südtirol bilden.<sup>147</sup>

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Auf Basis der mittelhochdeutschen Bearbeitungen des antiken Apolloniusstoffes wird das Thema des städtischen Freudenhauses in Wort und Bild abgehandelt. Durch den glücklichen Umstand der Überlieferung von drei illustrierten Ausgaben sind wir in der erfreulichen Lage, anschauliche Illustrationen von mittelalterlichen Freudenhäusern, Bordellwirten und Knechten bieten zu können. Die Darlegung des Stoffes erfolgte vor der Folie historischer Forschungsergebnisse und unter Einbeziehung umfassender literarischer Produkte des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit.

Die analysierten literarischen Quellen erzählen nur von weiblichen Prostituierten. Bei der Interpretation müssen die Absichten der Autoren, das von ihnen angesprochene Publikum und eventuell die Intentionen möglicher Auftraggeber berücksichtigt werden. Die Fastnachtspiele, die ein sehr buntes Abbild des Spätmittelalters liefern, wurden zur Belustigung und Belehrung der Zuschauer während der Fastnacht im städtischen Bereich zur Aufführung gebracht. Auffällige Tendenzen sind Übertreibung und Verunglimpfung der Bauern. Der Wiener Arzt Heinrich von Neustadt zeichnet in seinem Roman *Apollonius von Tyrus* eine jugendliche Sexsklavin und präsentiert damit ein bis heute existierendes Problem. Tarsia besitzt jedoch die Möglichkeit, ihrem Schicksal

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<sup>147</sup> Oswald von Wolkenstein, *Lieder*, Kl. 102; Marold, *Kommentar zu den Liedern Oswalds*, 245–47.



zu entrichten, weil sie als Königstochter eine hervorragende Ausbildung erfahren hat.

Vor allem durch Gottes Hilfe – so die Autorenintention –, aber auch durch die Hilfe eines mitleidigen Dieners wird sie gerettet. Alle Quellen, die ich zur Verfügung hatte, wurden von männlichen Autoren geschrieben; bei manchen ist ein eindeutig misogynen Charakter nicht zu übersehen. Obwohl die historische Forschung sich in den letzten Jahren verstärkt dem Problemkreis "Prostitution" annahm und wertvolle Ergebnisse erbrachte, ist unser Wissen über die Lebenswirklichkeit von Dirnen im Mittelalter bescheiden. Denn historische Quellen berichten aus der Sicht der Mächtigen und lassen die Lebensumstände der Armen und Außenseiter nur in Bruchstücken erkennen. Mithilfe der analysierten Dichtungen konnten von philologischer Seite interessante Erkenntnisse zu den Themen Mädchenhandel, Sklavenmarkt, städtische versus illegale Frauenhäuser sowie den Arbeitsbedingungen und der Reputation der Prostituierten beigebracht werden.

Mittelhochdeutsche Literatur gewährt durch die ausgeprägte didaktische Tendenz Einblicke in verschiedene Lebensformen realer oder fiktiver Natur. Die Analyse dichterischer Quellen bietet somit eine wertvolle Ergänzung zur Abrundung des Bildes, welches die historische Forschung in den letzten Jahrzehnten entworfen hat.



Abb. 1: Das *lupanare* in Pompeii, Aufnahme: Alfredo und Pio Foglia, Neapel.  
Aus: Antonio Varone, Das Lupanar, in: *Pompeji*, hg. Filippo Coarelli  
(München: Hirmer, 2002), 194



Abb. 2: Mädchenhandel im Hafen: *Wie Tarsia in der stat Miltena in d(a)z gemein frauenhausß verkaufft ward.* Heinrich Steinhöwel, *Apollonius* (Augsburg: Johannes Bämmler, 1476) fol. 117r (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008)



Abb. 3: *Wie Tarsia von dem künig und meniglichen unvermeijliget bleib / und wie sÿ alle man beweget in parmherczikeit dz sÿ wainen wurden* (119r). Der Holzschnitt zeigt ein Gebäude über Fließwasser. Im Gebäude sind das Freudenmädchen Tarsia und der sie bedrängende König als Freier dargestellt. Vor dem Freudenhaus, auf der Brücke warten zwei weitere Freier (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008)



Abb. 4: Freudenhaus mit Freudenmädchen und Freiern, *Apollonius von Tyrland* des Heinrich von Neustadt, Federzeichnung (Cod. 2886 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Wien, 1467) fol. 98r.

(<http://www.imareal.oew.ac.at/realonline/>: Bildnummer 003177; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008)

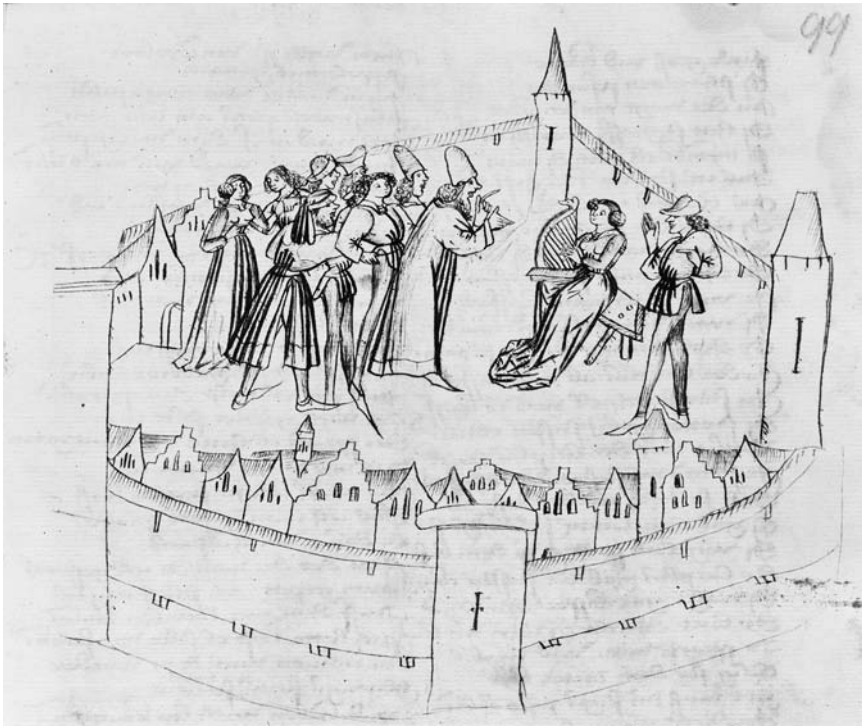


Abb. 5: Tarsia sitzt inmitten eines mittelalterlichen Marktplatzes auf einer Holzbank und spielt Harfe. Stadtbewohner, allen voran der Stadtfürst, lauschen ihrem Spiel (Cod. 2886 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Wien, 1467) fol.

99r, (<http://www.imareal.oeaw.ac.at/realonline/>: Bildnummer 003178; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008)



Abb. 6: Wie Athanagoras der künig Tarsiam berüffet / und wie vil er ir verhieß wann  
sÿ in frölich macht, Heinrich Steinhöwel, *Apollonius* (Augsburg: Johannes Bämle,  
1476) fol. 126v (<http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html>;  
letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008)



Abb. 7: *Der Jüngling und die zwei nackten Frauen*, ca. 1460/70, Meister der Bandrollen (Albertina, Wien, Österreich, DG1926/934)





Abb. 8: Der Frauenwirt wird verbrannt (Cod. 2886 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Wien, 1467) fol. 106r  
(<http://www.imareal.oeaw.ac.at/realonline/>: Bildnummer 003181; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008)



Abb. 9: Der Diener des Frauenwirtes wird freigelassen (Cod. 2886 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Wien, 1467) fol. 106v  
 (<http://www.imareal.oeaw.ac.at/realonline/>: Bildnummer 003182; letzter Zugriff am 31. März 2008)

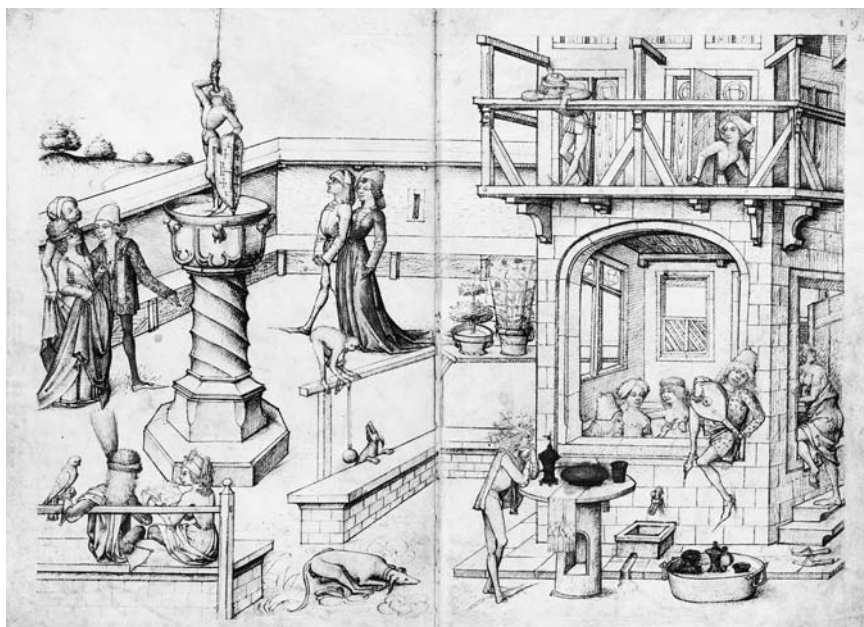


Abb. 10: Das Badehaus. Aus: *Das mittelalterliche Hausbuch*, fol. 18v–19r,  
 Christoph Graf zu Waldburg Wolfegg, *Venus und Mars*:  
*Das Mittelalterliche Hausbuch*  
 (München und Wien: Prestel, 1997), 46–47

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Prescription, Passion, and Patronage in  
Early Modern Spain:  
Legitimizing Illicit Love at Santo Domingo de Silos  
“el Antiguo,” Toledo

The convent of Santo Domingo de Silos “el Antiguo” in Toledo provides the setting for a story that combines prescription, passion and patronage by following the life-long love between its widowed foundress, María de Silva (ca. 1513–1575), and her confessor, Diego de Castilla (ca. 1508–1584). Apparently in close accordance with moralizing instruction, María de Silva embraced enclosure and with it the renunciation of her sexuality as she entered Santo Domingo el Antiguo. However, a closer examination of María’s thirty-eight years at the convent reveals a more complex picture than that suggested by the accolades of her piety recorded by her confessor in approximately 1583, which eulogized her exemplary life of devotion and extolled her provision for the re-edification of the convent.<sup>1</sup>

Working back from the end results of outwardly innocuous stipulations in her will, it becomes evident that a particularly close relationship existed between María de Silva and Diego de Castilla. This bond transcended the spiritual love between priest and confessant in a covenant also of the flesh.<sup>2</sup> Passions between

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<sup>1</sup> See Jesús González Martín, “Doña María de Silva, Fundadora de la Iglesia y Capilla Mayor del Monasterio de Santo Domingo el Antiguo de Toledo,” *Anales toledanos* 29 (1992): 29–58; here 32. Diego de Castilla’s laud of María de Silva is also noted by Verardo García Rey, “El Deán Don Diego de Castilla y la reconstrucción de Santo Domingo el Antiguo de Toledo. Segunda parte. Reconstrucción e Historia del Monasterio de Santo Domingo el Antiguo,” *Boletín de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes y Ciencias Históricas de Toledo* 18–19 (January and June, 1924): 28–109; here 31.

<sup>2</sup> Mann speculates: “However, the Dean’s decisión to locate the tombs of himself and his son opposite that of Doña María presupposes some special relationship among these people. In fact,

women and their confessors or other men of the cloth were not entirely uncommon in early modern Spain. For example, María de Silva's contemporary and fellow noble *toledana*, María de Mendoza y de la Cerda, incited the ardor of her tutor, the priest Álvaro Gómez, who frequented her Toledo home beginning in the 1550's—though she did not succumb to his "burning desire." Likewise, Estefanía Manrique de Castilla, another mid-century noble denizen of Toledo, chastely inspired Pedro de Ribadeneyra to pen an account of her praiseworthy life, even if of lesser renown than the subject of his most famous work, Ignatius Loyola.<sup>3</sup>

The relationship between María de Silva and her confessor transgressed the model of platonic devotion displayed by her peers. Furthermore, María's affair produced a son, Luis de Castilla.<sup>4</sup> Conclusive proof of her maternity would require disinterment and DNA testing that the nuns at Santo Domingo today would potentially find distasteful and sacrilegious. Nevertheless, careful consideration of Maria and Diego's whereabouts during their early Toledo years, the circumstances surrounding Luis's birthdate, and funerary arrangements for the trio, all but confirm their kinship.

Although María, Diego, and Luis never openly declared the complete details of their association, they clung to each other in life and death under a cloak of piety that maintained human devotion within accepted social and religious boundaries

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the arrangement of the tombs suggests that Doña María was the mistress of Don Diego and the mother of Don Luis. The existence of an amorous relationship between Don Diego and the beautiful Doña María would explain her appointment of him as the executor of her estate, his profound interest in her tomb, and the freedom with which he changed her original proposals . . . Moreover, if Don Luis were Doña María's son, his appointment as patron of the institution would actually have helped to preserve it as her property in perpetuity." See Richard Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons: Three Major Projects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 19–20.

<sup>3</sup> For the example of María de Mendoza y de la Cerda, see María del Carmen Vaquero Serrano, "Book in the Sewing Basket: María de Mendoza y de la Cerda," *Power and Gender in Renaissance Spain: Eight Women of the Mendoza Family, 1450–1650*, ed. Helen Nader (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 93–112. For Estefanía Manrique de Castilla, see Jodi Bilinkoff, "The Many 'Lives' of Pedro de Ribadeneyra," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52 (Spring 1999): 180–96. Many *beatas*, similar to Beguines or tertiaries, also developed particularly close relationships with their confessors and male followers, as noted by Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); see in particular Chapter 2, "Chastity and Danger." See also Jodi Bilinkoff, "A Spanish Prophetess and Her Patrons: The Case of María de Santo Domingo," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23, 1 (1992): 21–34.

<sup>4</sup> For a statement regarding the Diego as Luis's father, see Richard Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 3. Mann notes his indebtedness to Gregorio Andrés for sharing this information, thus the affirmation of the true kinship between Diego and Luis only dates to the early 1980s, when Andrés did the math and dug into university enrollment documentation. Subsequent works have incorporated the findings of Andrés and suggestions of Mann. See the catalog published to accompany the exhibition at The Metropolitan Museum of Art 7 October 2003–11 February 2004, David Davies, ed. *El Greco* (London: National Gallery Company, 2003), 115.

as they sought to preserve their elite status. In doing so, they succeeded in utilizing patronage to legitimize an otherwise illicit love affair, demonstrating how bonds of affection intersected with malleable definitions of sexual propriety in early modern Spain.

María de Silva's path to Toledo began in 1526, when at the age of thirteen she journeyed to Spain as a lady-in-waiting in the company of the Empress Isabel of Portugal (1503–1539). Within two years of arrival at court, María, the daughter of a royal overseer, Juan de Saldaña, had wed Pedro González de Mendoza, who served as majordomo and chief accountant of rents for the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Castile, Charles V (1500–1558), as recorded in a royal cedula of April 1528.<sup>5</sup> Pedro was the son of Honorato Hurtado de Mendoza, the third lord of Cañete and Francisca de Silva y Ribera, a daughter of the first count of Cifuentes, Juan de Silva, and his second wife, Inés de Ribera. Mendozas and Silvas routinely intermarried over the course of the late medieval and early modern period.

The union of María, though from a collateral Portuguese branch of the Silva family, and Pedro continued to extend the alliance strategies of both families. The Castilian Silvas were the counts of Cifuentes and also had prominence in Toledo. The Mendozas were most notably the dukes of Infantado, among many other titles. After her marriage, in the company of her husband, María moved to Cuenca, close to a Mendoza family seat in Cañete. Here she lived until Pedro's death in 1537. At the age of twenty-four, María suddenly found herself widowed, childless, and without the support of her immediate natal family, who remained in Portugal, although numerous members of the wider Silva lineage resided in Toledo.

Both the nature of María de Silva's marriage arrangements and her status as an elite widow conform closely to Castilian social and legal norms. Women's and men's sexuality alike found mediation in the milieu of the court, where noble families sent their children to perpetuate a system of patronage that operated to maintain social, economic, and political position. Members of the royal retinue such as María and Pedro, both from families of considerable repute, routinely found their marriage partners while serving at court and gained substantial compensation for their service at the date of their unions.

After Pedro's death, María enjoyed the liberties Castilian law afforded widows. A widow of any rank held undisputed inheritance rights to half the couple's joint goods at the time of her spouse's demise, along with a legally mandated recovery of her dowry and *arras* (bride gifts), and the possibility of receiving other bequests. She also could exercise rights to guardianship, regularly awarded, over any underage children and their estates. In addition, because she enjoyed full legal

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<sup>5</sup> *Archivo del Monasterio Cisterciense de Santo Domingo de Silos "El Antiguo"* (henceforth AMSDA) leg. 3/9. See also Gonzáles Martín, "Doña María de Silva," 31.

personhood, a widow could act autonomously making contracts and transactions, or otherwise engage the judicial system to the same extent as a man.<sup>6</sup>

As a propertied woman even before her marriage, María was in good financial shape upon her husband's death, obtaining the return of her dowry and *arras* (bridegift) of 200 ducats, along with half the couple's joint estate. These holdings included 252 ducats in annual revenues derived from properties in Cuenca, and approximately 186 ducats in annuities associated with the rights she obtained by being named *alcaidesa* (commander) and *corregidora* (royal municipal judge) of the fortress of Requena, which originally had been granted to her husband prior to their marriage.<sup>7</sup> In these aspects of her life María exemplifies the legal and financial empowerment widows drew upon after the demise of their spouses. Standard practice enabled Castilian widows with any property whatsoever to enjoy a degree of autonomy perhaps unsurpassed in Western Europe during the early modern period.

On the one hand, cultural norms supported and even openly encouraged widows to enjoy a rather unfettered autonomy in the context of daily life. On the other hand, this very liberty had the potential to destabilize gender roles and relationships when women came to assume responsibilities often reserved for men. By demanding that widows take up the tasks of household, property, business, and family headship, both social expectations and legal provisions alike set up tensions by accepting traits and behaviors in women frequently understood as masculine. Thus, even as broader legal and social mores affirmed widows'

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding ownership of the arras, see *Leyes de Toro* (henceforth *LT*), Ley 54; *Novísima Recopilación* (henceforth *NR*), Libro X, Título II, Ley II. Regarding rights concerning ownership of common property, see *Fuero Real* (henceforth *FR*), Libro III, Título III, Leyes I–III; *Leyes de Estilo*, Ley 203; *Enrique IV*, 1473, Petición 25; *LT*, Leyes 14–16, 60, 77–78; *NR*, Libro X, Título IV, Leyes I–XI. For additional rights to bequests, see *LT*, Ley 6; *NR*, Libro X, Título XX, Ley I; *LT*, Ley 16; *NR*, Libro X, Título IV, Ley VIII; *LT*, Ley 7; *NR*, Libro X, Título XX, Ley II; *LT*, Leyes 17–27; *NR*, Libro X, Título VI, Leyes I–XI; *LT*, Ley 28; *NR*, Libro X, Título XX, Ley VIII. For a full discussion of widowhood and legal rights, see the introduction to Stephanie Fink De Backer, *Widowhood, Autonomy and Power in Early Modern Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). For additional information regarding guardianship, see the work of Grace Coolidge, "Families in Crisis: Guardianship and the Nobility in Early Modern Spain," Ph.D. diss., University of Indiana, 2001. See also Grace Coolidge, "Neither dumb, deaf, nor destitute of understanding: Women as Guardians in Early Modern Spain," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, 3 (2005): 673–93. See also *Fuero Viejo de Castilla*, Libro V, Título IV, Leyes 1–4; *FR*, Libro IV, Título III, Ley III; *Siete Partidas*, Partida VI, Título XVI, Leyes 4–6, 9, 11, and 16–21; *LT*, ley 16; *NR*, libro X, tit. IV, ley VIII. All law codes cited can be found in *Los códigos españoles concordados y anotados*, Vol. 1–12, ed. Joaquín Francisco Pacheco, et al. (Madrid: Impr. de la Publicidad, a cargo de M. Rivadeneyra, 1847–1851).

<sup>7</sup> *AMSDA*, leg. 3/8 notes the grant to Pedro González de Mendoza; leg. 3/11 grants rights of inheritance to Requena to a male child born of his marriage to María de Silva; leg. 3/13 shows that María de Silva had been granted rights of jurisdiction by May 8, 1538. This document notes that María had named an acting corregidor for the village of Requena. For transcriptions of related documents, see García Rey, "El Deán Don Diego de Castilla, Segunda parte," 65–75.

autonomy, the rhetoric contained in prescriptive treatises gives strong evidence that fear of women's independence as a potentially disruptive force provoked an insistence on the containment of female sexuality as an essential element of upholding social order. Repeated injunctions found in prescriptive treatises and secular writing, whether provoked by fear or titillation, demanded that widows repress their sexuality in order to exist within customary norms defining masculine and feminine characteristics.

Prescriptive constructs mapped out an ambiguously gendered space by requiring women to become men, but at the same time, insisting that widows renounce the sexual liberty and dominance associated with masculinity. For a widow to become *varonil* (manly) she could only assume those particular masculine traits deemed essential for safeguarding social order; any display of sexuality could undermine, rather than maintain, this ideal. By autonomously expressing her sexuality, a widow would at once threaten men in multiple spheres: the male role in the theater of sex by usurping men's initiative in sexual advances; the integrity of the family by disrupting patterns of inheritance should she produce a competing set of heirs to her estate; and clerical ideals of continence that were preferred over "chaste sex" within the legitimate bonds of a subsequent marriage.

On many levels, complete suppression of the widow's sexuality ensured her spiritual and social place in a way that accorded with broader sacred and secular values. Nevertheless, to evade censure, widows could and did negotiate moralistic discourse to seek remedy, both spiritual and physical. María de Silva provides a striking case of how a woman could employ a strategy of outwardly conforming to prescriptive mandates in order to mitigate their transgression.<sup>8</sup>

A contemporary advice manual, *Norte de los estados* (1530), written by the Franciscan friar and noted mystic Francisco de Osuna (ca.1492–ca. 1540), offers insight into common clerical assessments of widowhood. While Osuna directs much of his commentary on the condition of widowhood toward the widower, his interlocutor, he also makes remarks regarding the widow and her obligations. He

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<sup>8</sup> Scholars until quite recently have focused on the image of women found in prescriptive treatises, Golden Age literature, and anthropological studies, which characterize Spanish women as subject to a rigorous honor code based on upholding sexual purity. More recent scholarship has been increasingly critical of this assessment. For a brief summary of the historiography women and the honor paradigm, see Allyson Poska, *Women and Authority in Early Modern Spain: the Peasants of Galicia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2–9. Scott Taylor questions the monolithic nature of twentieth-century anthropological studies that define honor in terms of female sexual chastity in "Credit, Debt, and Honor in Castile, 1600–1650," *Journal of Early Modern History* 7, 1–2 (2003): 8–27; here 8. In her introduction to *Power and Gender*, 4–6, Helen Nader critiques modern scholars' over-reliance on conduct manuals, which has produced an overly-static view of patriarchy.



cautions any widowed spouse against remarriage, instead preferring the continence that would allow the remaining partner to focus upon both the spiritual and practical advantages of widowhood. Osuna states:

... y la biuda se embuelve con su criado faltando su marido: ya que por estar esenta i libre no teme a nadie. Lo segundo es la disminucion de la hazienda que cada día se apoca: en tanta manera que parece yrse todo tras el muerto: assi que parece perderse la onra por infamia: y la hazienda por mal recaudo. (*el auctor*) El remedio de lo primero es la buena compañía sin sospecha que deven buscar las personas biudas: i si toda via murmuraren las malas lenguas busquen esendo de paciencia ... porque el solaz de los malos es murmurar de los que son buenos ...<sup>9</sup>

[... and without her husband, the widow gets involved with her servant, since being independent and free, she doesn't fear anyone. The second [issue] is her diminishing estate, which shrinks every day; in such a way that it seems that it all slips away following after the deceased. As such, she seems to lose her honor on account of infamy, and her estate due to carelessness. (*The author*) The remedy for the first problem is for widows to seek good company above suspicion; and if vicious tongues still wag, strive for patience ... because the solace of the wicked is to gossip about those who are good.]

Osuna's comments on suspicions surrounding widows shacking up with their servants and his warnings about the perils of diminishing one's estate by reckless second unions accurately convey broader social concerns about maintaining household integrity. At the same time, he offers consolation by suggesting that proper maintenance of reputation, including seeking good company and patiently bearing malicious gossip, could elevate a good widow above worldly concerns.

When confronted by the widow's purported excuse for remarrying, as she fears the dissolution of her estate without a husband's aid, Osuna notes that women have already accustomed themselves to running the household when their husbands are absent. He observes:

... y es cosa que ellas ponderan mucho: diziendo que todo se va tras el marido: y que la sola muger no puede solicitar la hazienda: porque se le deshaze entre manos como la sal en el agua ... Porque si quando va el marido largo camino: tiene la muger cargo de regir la hazienda: i los hijos: i la familia: porque no terna este mesmo cargo quando su marido va al otro mundo ...<sup>10</sup>

[... and this is something they think about a lot, saying everything slips away following after the husband. The solitary woman cannot ask for the estate because it

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<sup>9</sup> Francisco de Osuna, *Norte de los estados en que se da regla de vivir a los mancebos: y a los casados: y a los biudos: y a todos los continentes: y se tratan muy por estenso los remedios del desastrado casamiento: enseñando que tal a de ser la vida del cristiano casado* (Seville: Bartolomé Pérez, 1531), f. 179 r. This translation and all subsequent translations are mine.

<sup>10</sup> Osuna, *Norte de los estados*, f. 179 v.

will dissolve in her hands like salt in water . . . But when the husband goes on a long journey, the wife has the job of ruling the household, and the children, and the family. Why shouldn't she take up this same responsibility when her husband goes to the other world . . .]

Indeed, asserts Osuna, widowhood presents few extra challenges beyond those which women habitually confront, and thus household headship should hardly be feared. Once the immediate demands of estate settlement have been met, Osuna recommends that the widow unburden herself of material worries and put all her trust in Christ, since widows receive much aid as persons particularly benefiting from God's grace.<sup>11</sup> Osuna clearly recognizes a widow's capacity to attend to household management. Nevertheless, he suggests she should relinquish this power, lest she succumb to the carnality associated with the life of the flesh.

After dispensing with the pragmatic reasons why widows should shun second unions, Osuna moves on to discuss the qualities most befitting their station in life. He emphasizes, not surprisingly, humility, noting in accordance with the words of St. Paul, that in their comportment and dress, widows should be exemplars for others: the true widow is a humble widow. The second quality suiting the widow is modesty, defined in particular by controlling importune glances, maintaining perpetual mourning (if not for the husband, then for Christ's Passion), and most importantly, observing strict enclosure.

The concept of enclosure encompassed the physical attributes of a pseudo-monastic life, where the company of good widows and spotless virgins might be kept while employing edifying speech instead of recollections of the past. It also demanded the inner silence and tranquility of *recogimiento*, defined by a pious, chaste retreat into spiritual devotions and charitable works, preferably under the careful guidance of a scrupulous confessor. These necessary measures aided the widow as she fended off the demonic assaults that would otherwise surely result in a decent into the filth of fornication. In following, temperance in what the widow sees, hears, and eats, like such noteworthy Old Testament exemplars as Anna, Naomi, and in particular, Judith, concludes the list of precepts that form the prelude to the greatest virtue of all, chastity.<sup>12</sup>

These guidelines helped promote an ideal state of widowhood, free from the sexual entrapments of the marital bed. Maintaining a chaste life rewarded widows

<sup>11</sup> Osuna, *Norte de los estados*, f. 179 v.–80 v.

<sup>12</sup> Osuna, *Norte de los estados*, f. 181r.–183r. The stress on Judith as an exemplar is echoed in a number of early modern Castilian treatises. For example, see Martín Carrillo, *Elogios de mugeres insignes del Viejo Testamento* (Huesca: Pedro Bluson, 1627); Gaspar Astete, *Tratado del gobierno de la familia y estado de las viudas y donzellas* (Burgos: Phillipe de Iunta, 1597); and Francisco Ortiz Lucio, *Lugares comunes de la segunda impresión, muy corregida y emendada, con una nueva tabla y compendio de todas las doctrinas, lugares y escripturas, de grande utilidad para todos los estados, especial para Predicadores, Curas, y Prelados* (Alcalá de Henares: Iuan Íñiguez de Lequerica, 1592).

with a degree of spiritual worth only lower to that of virgins. This hierarchy of status had been recognized and embraced by theologians throughout the history of the Church. In keeping with this tradition, calls for the conscientious practice of *recogimiento* and the chastity it demanded constituted the basis for a widow's ability to overcome her inherently weak and libidinous nature. By containing lust, the widow had the opportunity to redeem herself via devotion to spiritual pursuits and the interests of her family, all of which answered to the needs of a stable Christian society.

In 1538 the peripatetic Castilian royal court moved to Toledo. According to contemporary accounts, the Empress Isabel supposedly became jealous of the attention given to the widowed María de Silva, her beautiful former attendant, who was being courted with attractive proposals for remarriage. In response, the Empress summoned María from Cuenca and arranged for her to reside at Santo Domingo el Antiguo. It is unclear whether María desired a haven and requested the Empress's assistance to find shelter in Toledo, or if she was in some way coerced into the arrangement. According to Diego de Castilla, María sought repose and a life of contemplation. Other accounts suggest the Empress wanted to remove María from the marriage market out of spite.<sup>13</sup> Although María's attitude toward the move to Toledo will remain unclear, she ultimately chose to live in Toledo alongside the nuns at Santo Domingo el Antiguo in her own chambers, rather than accept any of the propositions that had been laid before her. After some renovation work to expand her lodgings and make room for her servants, María settled in at this humble Cistercian convent until her death in October 1575.

The bare outline of María de Silva's life concurs well with recommendations moralists offered elite widows in the mid-sixteenth century, following traditions reaching back to late antiquity. In accordance with prescriptive mandates, María seemingly renounced the world of flesh in order to observe a life of *recogimiento*. By retiring to the relative seclusion of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, by no means the wealthiest convent in Toledo at the time, she gave every indication of leaving the temptations of an unsheltered life. Her reclusion, versus remarriage, indicated that she would deny the possibility of reawakening the sexual impulses, even those sanctified by the marital bed, particularly associated with women. Such a path marked her as a prudent widow, who dutifully acted upon the moralists' admonitions to eschew worldliness and, even more importantly, sex.

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<sup>13</sup> Regarding the gossip surrounding María's beauty and the orders issued by the Empress, see Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 16. In footnote 76, Mann cites Salazar y Castro, *Historia genealógica*, I: 256, who is also cited by Verardo García Rey, "El Deán Don Diego de Castilla y la reconstrucción de Santo Domingo el Antiguo de Toledo. Primera Parte," *Real Academia de Bellas Artes y Ciencias Históricas de Toledo* 16–17 (Jul.–Deca. 1923): 129–89; here 72. For a narrative of the basic outlines regarding María's life prior to and upon her arrival in Toledo, see González Martín, "Doña María de Silva," 31–32. See also García Rey, "El Deán, Segunda Parte," 31–34.

María's places of residence are for the most part well established. But Diego de Castilla had a more mobile and less verifiable trajectory, which may have taken him to court prior to his eventual residence in Toledo. Diego was the illegitimate son of Felipe de Castilla, whose career included serving as a canon in the cathedral of Palencia, appointment as Charles V's head sacristan in 1525, then finally nomination to the deanship of Toledo's cathedral chapter in 1532. Diego was born to Francisca de Encinas in Valladolid in approximately 1507 or 1508. He was raised in the Hieronymite monastery of Montmartá outside Zamora under the guardianship of his great aunt, María Niño de Portugal, where they resided until her death in 1525.<sup>14</sup> He pursued his bachelor's degree at Salamanca and took the tonsure in 1528 in Valladolid, where he was engaged in further studies, before receiving his degree in civil law later in the year.<sup>15</sup> In 1530, he left Spain to study at Bologna, earning his doctorate in civil and canon law in 1536.<sup>16</sup>

These enrollment records from the universities of Salamanca and Bologna help to pinpoint some of his movements, yet Diego's exact whereabouts between 1525 and 1530, save for his 1528 sojourn in Valladolid, are unclear. It would not be wrong to suggest that following the death of his guardian, Diego may have visited his father with some frequency in the interval between 1525 and 1530. The court moved between Valladolid, Palencia, and Burgos during 1527 and 1528 in efforts to avoid outbreaks of plague, all within easy reach of Salamanca.<sup>17</sup> Possibly, he even obtained a position in the royal retinue, as records show a certain Diego de Castilla holding the office of page in the household of the Empress from 1526 until her death in 1539.<sup>18</sup> Although Diego certainly did not maintain a continuous physical residence at court or actively serve Isabel until 1539, he may have intermittently rendered service until his departure for Italy, then retained an honorary stipend from this post as a royal favor.

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<sup>14</sup> García Rey names María Niño de Portugal Diego de Castilla's great aunt in "El Deán, Primera Parte," 133 and 156–157. Richard Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, names the "great aunt," María Niño de Portugal as Diego's mother. Unless García Rey's genealogical information is way off, this relationship is not possible, despite Mann's argument that because Diego de Castilla built a chapel for his aunt at the monastery where she resided and he had been raised, and provided for masses to be said at that chapel for his unnamed mother. Mann did not do his genealogy homework on this one, only speculating based on the devotion Diego showed toward María Niño de Portugal. In fact, Gregorio Andrés provides documentary evidence for Francisca de Encinas as Diego's mother in "El Arcediano de Cuenca, D. Luis de Castilla (+1618) protector del Greco y su biblioteca manuscrita," *Hispania sacra* 35 (1983): 87–141; here 90.

<sup>15</sup> For the narrative version of these events, see Verardo García Rey, "El Deán, Primera Parte," 133–34.

<sup>16</sup> Andrés, "El Arcediano de Cuenca," 91.

<sup>17</sup> Location of the court: Valladolid, February–September 1527; Palencia, September 1527; Burgos, October 1527–February 1528.

<sup>18</sup> *Archivo General de Simancas, Casas y Sitios Reales*, leg. 67, 5. Thank you to Aurelio Espinosa, who provided this data.

Of particular note, María de Silva's period of attendance on the Empress Isabel from 1526–1528 directly overlaps with Diego's probable presence at court during these very same years. Furthermore, Diego and María were quite close in age: she was born in approximately 1513, making her only five or six years his junior.<sup>19</sup> Keeping in mind the social mingling characteristic of the court, there is every reason to believe that Diego and María made an initial and significant acquaintance at gatherings of courtiers, where Felipe introduced his son to a life of service to church and crown.

However, even though the teens may have been attracted to one another, as an illegitimate son of a cleric, Diego was lucky to have a well-engineered church career in front of him. María, as a lady-in-waiting, awaited a marriage negotiated by her family and employers with a match drawn from among other noble retainers of the crown. Although fifteen would not have been an unusual age for a noble girl to wed, the short interval of time between María's entrance at court and her marriage contract may point to an effort to quash a dalliance with Diego—both were reputed to be extremely good looking. With youthful fancies nipped in the bud, in 1528 their destinies parted, as María headed off to Cuenca with her new husband and Diego soon left Spain for Bologna.

Their paths crossed for what can be hypothesized a second time in Toledo. First, recall that María had arrived in 1538 to take up residence at Santo Domingo. Soon after, in 1539 Diego came to receive his appointment as canon and archdean of Toledo's cathedral chapter. Not merely coincidentally, archival evidence drawn from María's accounts suggests that she may have conceived a child, Luis, at some date in 1539. Because the family did not reveal their kinship, proof of María's maternity is still a subject of debate. Art historian Gregorio Andrés proposes Juana Gudiel as Luis's mother, based on testamentary bequests made by Diego for funeral masses dedicated to her, his aunt, and his mother. Although Andrés convincingly explains the certainty of Diego de Castilla's paternity and makes a good case for Palencia as Luis's birth-place, his deduction regarding Juana Gudiel is disputable.

In contrast to Andrés's theory, it is more probable that María became re-acquainted in a most intimate fashion with Diego upon his arrival in Toledo in 1539, and this reunion produced Luis. Receipts at the convent show that in 1539 and 1540, María sought to clear up a large number of debts, including selling off some household goods. Similar types of documentation disappear by 1541 and 1542.<sup>20</sup> These accounting issues could be the by-product of settling her husband's

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<sup>19</sup> For an explanation and documentation of Diego de Castilla's birthdate, birthplace and parentage, see Andrés, "El Arcediano," 90.

<sup>20</sup> See account records for 1539–1540, *AMSDA Legajos* 1/2; 5/31; 31/14–31/19 and 31/21–31/27; 35/3–35/4; 36/21–36/22. Sale of goods appears in Legajo 37/31, 1540.

estate, but the two-year lag between his death in 1537 and these records suggests something else was afoot. The flurry of activities gains particular pertinence when considering that women routinely died in childbirth. María, like any responsible propertied woman, would have wanted to put her estate in order as a customary precaution. Also, María received an indulgence in exchange for a ducat toward fighting the Turks, allowing her to eat a light meal in the afternoons on fast-days during Lent. Such a request would correspond with the dietary needs of pregnancy.<sup>21</sup>

By February 1541, María had dispatched a letter to a trusted associate in Madrid asking him to send money due to her *gran necesidad* (great need) and thanking the agent for attending to her estate. While the catch-phrase *gran necesidad* does not necessarily indicate financial distress, María's missive very likely may have been generated by the need for funds to care for Luis in his infancy.<sup>22</sup> As with the aforementioned account receipts, the surrounding years lack correspondence sent by María, or indications of budget problems. In sum, María's account records found in the convent archive, while not definitive, add to a growing body of evidence demonstrating that María was, indeed, Luis's mother.

The second element of debate surrounding Luis is the place of his birth. Andrés makes the claim for Palencia, a theory with considerable merit. Diego de Castilla had life-long connections to the city's cathedral. His grandfather had been the archbishop and his father had been a canon. Diego himself served as archdean, then archdeacon and canon after his return from Italy. Even though no conclusive documentary evidence exists that can trace María de Silva to a stay in Palencia in 1539–1540, Diego surely could have managed a discreet delivery and recovery period for his noble mistress. Alternately, and more likely, María's private life in her chambers among her retinue at Santo Domingo el Antiguo could have provided sufficient cover for a pregnancy and childbirth that had the potential to undermine her reputation.

The possibility of an unmarried, widowed noblewoman bearing a child under the noses of nuns is a scenario less shocking than it may appear—such births were hardly rare. Other noble contemporaries of María who had illegitimate offspring include Luisa de la Cerda, sister of the third and fourth dukes of Medinaceli; the daughter of the count of Monteagudo, María Hurtado de Mendoza y Chacón, who bore the son of Bishop Gutierre de Vargas Carvajal; and the twelve noblewomen appearing in Coolidge's study.<sup>23</sup> These women, along with many unnamed ones,

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<sup>21</sup> AMSDA Pergaminos, 6/3.

<sup>22</sup> AMSDA Legajos 9/3, 1541.

<sup>23</sup> For Luisa de la Cerda, see María Pillar Manero Sorolla, "On the Margins of the Mendoza: Luisa de la Cerda and María de San José (Salazar)," *Power and Gender*, ed. Nader, 114. Anne J. Cruz cites the case of María Hurtado de Mendoza y Chacón, "Willing Desire: Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza

whose children ably lived in elite circles, found ways to avoid ostracism for themselves and their progeny in a society that supposedly, according to sixteenth-century moralists and many modern scholars, held fast to strict notions of female sexual purity as the basis for a woman's honor. However, unlike these cases, María de Silva did not flaunt prescriptive mandates by openly acknowledging Luis. Instead, she fervently embraced these ideals as a means to conceal the fact that they had been breached.

At the same time María confronted the demands of pregnancy and childbirth, it appears that Diego, too, had baby business to look after. In 1540, Diego petitioned Pope Paul III for a vacant benefice in the diocese of Palencia. This request was granted in 1541.<sup>24</sup> Diego's father approached the pope in 1542, asking him to formalize a dispensation granting his son legitimacy and concurrently awarding him the post of perpetual, resident, co-administrator of the deanship of the Toledan cathedral chapter, with rights to succeed in the position. Felipe supposedly acted on account of his poor health. But he also may have been acting in complicity with Diego's desire to establish himself permanently in Toledo, on account of María and Luis.<sup>25</sup> In any case, the potential taint of illegitimate birth surely did not impede Diego's ascent to positions of ecclesiastical prominence.

Despite his rising career, or perhaps because of it, Diego had seemingly yielded to the temptations of the stereotypical lascivious young widow, alternately reviled and satirized by authors both of literature both sacred and secular. The fulminations of moralists sought the salvation of the widow's soul in treatises written to guide her along the road of virtuosity appropriate to her spouseless condition, fervently proscribing sexual activity and remarriage. A particularly rabid exponent of *recogimiento*, the Franciscan friar Francisco Ortíz Lucio authored a number of devotional works published at the turn of the seventeenth century that advocated a complete avoidance of women altogether, since they held an almost unabated potential to ensnare men in sin.

The writings of Ortíz Lucio reflect not only a continuum in clerical positions regarding female perfidy, but also signal a new wave in post-Tridentine reform efforts aimed at shaping Christian morality in general and the behavior of clerics

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and Female Subjectivity," *Power and Gender*, ed. Nader, 180. For twelve noblewomen mistresses, see Coolidge, "A Vile and Abject Woman," particular the case of Mencía de Lemos, a Portuguese noblewoman who came to Spain with princess Juana of Portugal upon her marriage to Enrique IV of Castile in 1455. She had a long-standing affair with Pedro González de Mendoza, the archbishop of Toledo and Seville, 202–203.

<sup>24</sup> AMSDA, Legajos 3/16–3/17.

<sup>25</sup> AMSDA, Legajos 3/18–3/19. For another example of a well-positioned churchman seeking and receiving legitimation for a son entering an ecclesiastical career, see the actions of Pedro González de Mendoza, the archbishop of Toledo (1428–1495), noted by Vaquero Serrano, "Book in the Sewing Basket," *Power and Gender*, ed. Nader, 92–93.

in particular. To this end, he notes that because women are so likely to lure men into the temptations of the flesh, they should be shunned at all costs. He maintains that women should be enclosed in their homes, where no one could see them. If they should happen to go out, no one ought to look at them intently or directly.<sup>26</sup> In order to evade carnal urges, Ortíz Lucio orders: "Meteos dentro de vuestra casa, y no os faltara Dios, como la biuda, que encerrada se remedio: y el vaso fuera de la vasera peligra . . . ."<sup>27</sup> ["Keep yourselves in your homes, and don't forget God—like the widow who saves herself via enclosure: the glass outside the cabinet is in danger. . . ."]. Not only did the unenclosed widow threaten to shatter the purity of her own chastity, but also the shards of her lacerating sexuality could wound any man who might gaze upon her glimmering form.

This warning seconded the opinions of Osuna, who had observed that young, falsely pious widows who try to bait men of the cloth into sin should be labeled among the fornicating deceivers so aptly defined by St. Paul. In keeping with Pauline prescription, Osuna commands his audience:

Apartate de las biudas mas moças. Estas después de biudas tienen menos seso que antes que se casassen. . . por esto las llaman biudas del diablo: que suelen muchas vezes a la iglesia a visitar los angeles de satanas su señor i visitar las personas religiosas so color de santidad: i van mucho a ver los abades por los enlazar. . . parescen veletas de tejado que se buelven a todo viento: no guardandose a dios: ni a los onbres.<sup>28</sup>

[Keep yourself away from young widows. These women have less sense as widows than they did before being married . . . and for this reason they are called devil's widows—these women who frequent the church to visit the angels of Satan their master, and to visit men of the cloth under the cover of sanctity. And they go often to see abbots in order to entrap them . . . [these bad widows] are like cloth sails that turn with every gust of wind, neither keeping faith with God nor with men.]

The young, beautiful María de Silva certainly could confirm these sorts of suspicions by feeding the flames of imaginations obsessed with the dangers of concupiscence.

Moralists stood wary of the unrestrained wiles of the widow, fearful of the lusts that overwhelmed not only her, but also any man foolish enough to fall into her clutches. Secular authors, too, categorized the young widow as menacingly libidinous, even if at the same time they seemed particularly titillated by her unrestrained sexuality.<sup>29</sup> Hence the secular literature of the period signaled the

<sup>26</sup> Ortíz Lucio, *Lugares comunes*, f. 3r: "La muger de encerrada en casa, nadie la vea, y si va fuera de casa, nadie la pueda ver de apresurada . . ."

<sup>27</sup> Ortíz Lucio, *Lugares comunes*, f. 5r.

<sup>28</sup> Osuna, *Norte de los estados*, f. 183v–84r.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the overlapping themes and attitudes of early modern authors both sacred and



prospects open to new suitors, reminding not widows, but instead those who sought their companionship about the perils of passion that drove men to court experienced women. A portion of Cristóbal de Castillejo's *Diálogo de las condiciones de las mugeres* considers the problem of widowhood. It dwells in particular on the young widow's devious nature, much in keeping with the moralists' worst fears regarding the consequences for those who might find themselves in her power.

Castillejo creates a conversation between the naïve Fileno and the worldly Aletio. At first mindful of the widow's plight, Fileno rapidly finds himself disabused of any sympathy toward her, as Aletio swiftly recounts the joy with which young women greet the liberation of their bodies and goods from the control of their spouses. After a quick display of feigned bereavement, continues Aletio, these worldly widows set about finding new men, who will, in the end, suffer miserable fates should they succumb. He concludes by cautioning that these sordid affairs end, more often than not, in illegitimate back-alley births.<sup>30</sup> Fileno may have found the idea of courting a young widow attractive at the outset, but by the end of the dialog, both parties agree that her unfettered sexuality unleashed a castrating libido even more potent than that of the moralists' darkest nightmares.

The widow's stereotypical insatiability also inspired the Toledan writer Sebastian de Horozco, whose output ranged from chronicles to *coplas*. In one particular ditty found in his *Cancionero*, Horozco lampoons a widow's fondness for clerics.

"El auctor a una dama que en muriendo el marido se amancebo con un fraile."

La muerte del mal logrado  
aunque os dio, dama passion,  
él aun no estaba enterrado  
ya vos abiedes tomado  
hábito de religion.

A todo aprovechará  
si es nuevo y de buena trama,  
que, como es invierno ya,  
también os callentará  
de noche echado en la cama.<sup>31</sup>

["The author to a woman, who upon the death of her husband became a priest's concubine."

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secular, see Melveena McKendrick, *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Study of the 'Mujer Varonil'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), especially p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Cristóbal de Castillejo, *Diálogo de las condiciones de las mugeres* (Alcalá de Henares: Andrés Sánchez de Ezpeleta, 1615 [1573]), 445–462, "de viudas."

<sup>31</sup> Sebastián de Horozco, *El Cancionero*, ed. Jack Weiner. *Utah Studies in Literature and Linguistics*, 3 (Bern and Frankfurt/M.: Herbert Lang, 1975), 65. The translation is my own.

Upon the death of the doomed,  
although dame passion granted it,  
he wasn't even entombed  
and already you had assumed  
the religious habit.

Take advantage of everything you will  
if it's new and a good tack,  
and since arrived is winter's chill,  
to warm yourself you will  
at night throw yourself in the sack.]

Diego de Castilla was hardly a mere fornicating friar and María de Silva did not live with him like a common-born woman in a state of concubinage. However, this affair, had it become public, would have confirmed the vision in the popular imagination of churchmen and their lovers. At the same time, it would substantiate broader suspicions about the uninhibited sexuality of Osuna's "devil's widows," those treacherous women who had the power to transform chaste spiritual solace into impious physical embraces. The widow's inconstancy drove her to put aside her allegiance to the memory of her deceased spouse. Even worse, it propelled her into the bed of another man—taking up the wrong kind of religious "habit." The unappeasable female libido upended sexual hierarchies, both sacred and secular, leading to the corruption of souls and subservience of men to women's desires.

Despite the potential consequences of illicit unions, neither Diego nor María appear to have paid dearly in terms of their reputations, arguably because they did not make the affair widely known. Noblewomen and churchmen certainly could and did engage in illicit unions and produce illegitimate offspring without great penalty. However, in order to escape reprisal, at least one party had to possess unassailable lineage, great wealth, or impeccable connections. It is not clear that either María or Diego found themselves in such a position in 1540. First, María did not enjoy the physical presence of her immediate natal family and her patron, the Empress, had recently died. At this juncture, any sort of scandalous comportment could alienate her influential in-laws, the Mendoza, on whom she might need to rely in the future. Furthermore, María owed her rights over Requena and its considerable income to royal privilege, which theoretically could be revoked. Finally, Diego had begun his climb to the upper ranks of the church, but he had hardly arrived. His position in the cathedral chapter was not uncontested, while his own status as illegitimate had yet to be absolved. Due to their somewhat precarious circumstances, neither María nor Diego had adequate assurance that their affair would not jeopardize their elite status or their son's future, and thus

chose the cover of spiritual devotion to mask their illicit passion.<sup>32</sup>

Whether or not the physical aspect of their relationship continued beyond the early years cannot be determined from extant documentation. In addition, the interval between Luis's birth and María's death, spanning from 1540–1575, shows only fleeting evidence of familial affiliation. During this period, Diego advanced in his career. Upon the death of his father in 1551, Diego formally assumed the deanship of the Toledan cathedral chapter, a position that would grant him great power, especially during the seventeen-year imprisonment of Archbishop Carranza, whom he ardently supported. Meanwhile, María lived in considerable comfort, as attested to by account books showing her expenditures on household goods, clothing, and staff. She also gave support to the nuns at Santo Domingo, whom she supplied generously thanks to the income she derived from Requena and other properties in Cuenca.

Beyond a glimpse at María's material circumstances, receipts from account books at Santo Domingo also show that the nuns raised children in their midst. Thus it is entirely possible, though not specifically documented in this instance, that Luis passed his earliest years in the comfort of his mother's chambers. Indeed, his father had been raised at a monastery, and evidence exists to confirm this practice at other monastic institutions.<sup>33</sup> Luis definitely spent his youth attending grammar school in Toledo, ostensibly in contact with both his parents. He moved on to the study of rhetoric and Greek at a local Toledan university under the tutelage of Juan de Vergara. He subsequently left for Valladolid, where he enrolled with the assumed name of Luis Cesár from Toledo, to complete his bachelor's degree in civil law in 1565.<sup>34</sup> Only upon pursuing further studies at Salamanca and Alcalá did Luis take on the surname "Castilla" and declare Palencia as his birthplace.

As Luis set out for Rome to start his career in 1571, revelations about his family may have been a deliberate attempt to benefit from patronage networks via association with his father's now well-respected name. During that period Luis asserted a curious family tie by claiming he was Diego's uncle. The identification

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<sup>32</sup> Perhaps the most famous, if not infamous, medieval example of such a relationship can be seen in the case of Heloise and Abelard. See the contribution to this volume by Juanita Ferros Ruys. In the early modern Spanish context, such relationships are known to historians via inquisition records tracing relationships between *beatas* and their followers or confessors.

<sup>33</sup> AMSDA, Legajos 25/68, 25/70, 25/76, 25/78, 25/81, 25/87. Illegitimate children of the Silva family, the Counts of Cifuentes, are found, for instance, at Nuestra Señora de Belen in Cifuentes and Nuestra Señora de la Madre de Dios in Toledo, *Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Clero*, Libro 15422.

<sup>34</sup> Luis de Castilla attended a grammar school operating as a dependency of the University of Santa Catalina in Toledo, then continued studying rhetoric and Greek with Juan de Vergara, who would serve as part of the team re-edifying Santo Domingo el Antiguo. See Andrés, "El Arcediano," 93–94.

of Palencia, in contrast to Andrés affirmations of the claim's veracity, could have been a conscious effort to redirect potentially prying eyes away from his early life in Toledo in contact with his mother. After all, in the absence of baptismal records, no one could prove otherwise. The construction of Luis's identity thus became a strategy that the family used to forward his career without attracting negative attention.

With Luis off to Italy, María began working in concert with Diego to obtain for their son a position in Cuenca. Consequently, in 1575, Pope Gregory XII bestowed upon Luis the title of archdean of Cuenca's cathedral chapter. Luis returned to Spain to receive the honor, only to be met with the death of his mother later in the year.<sup>35</sup> Andrés maintains that Luis received the post thanks to a five-times-removed paternal relative. This theory is a far stretch, at best. Instead, María's Cuenca ties provide a more immediate and plausible patronage link. First, she had relatives among the marquises of Cañete, whose properties lay in the archdiocese of Cuenca. One of María's brothers-in-law, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, was the first marquis of Cañete, while another, Francisco, served as a canon in the cathedral. Furthermore, María held jurisdiction over Requena, 60 miles east of Cañete. Thus it is more conceivable that Diego pulled strings with his church connections and María turned to her marital family in order to secure a future for their son. Diego helped out an "uncle," while María piously exercised charity in advancing the career of a promising young man her confessor had pointed out as worthy. Both Diego and María utilized accepted modes of patronage to conceal their illicit kinship and at the same time satisfy their desire to advance family interests.

The care Luis and Diego had exercised in masking their true relationship at a time when men supposedly suffered little from the taint of illegitimacy or extra-marital unions raises at least two issues surrounding the potential price to pay for illicit sexual activity. First, in the wake of fresh Tridentine pronouncements on the imperative of clerical celibacy and the exclusion of illegitimate sons from church office, Diego may have wished to exercise caution until proper channels had been accessed. In order to initiate Luis's career, Diego thus chose to operate under the cover of familial support of his supposed uncle in order to evade the new rules of the game. Second, out of genuine respect and concern for María, both father and son decided to play by the prescriptive handbook, concealing their familial love under the guise of spiritual friendship in order to spare her the potential scorn that could be heaped upon a widow tainted by a fall into lust—especially one who had spent long years in residence at a convent.

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<sup>35</sup> Andrés, "El Arcediano," 96.

The family's successes indicate that to varying extents illegitimacy could be overcome. Nevertheless, it still might present obstacles even for members of the elite. At the same time Luis's career advanced, concerns in some circles regarding purity of lineage had heightened. After the deaths of both his mother and father, Luis had been serving the crown as a royal visitor in Milan. In 1590, he sought appointment to a more prestigious office. As part of the petitioning process to obtain his appointment, Luis penned a genealogical record in defense of his bloodline in order to mitigate doubts about his illegitimate status. Within a letter written to Philip II dated 1590, Luis openly states his paternal filiation and avers the high birth of his mother. However, he omits her name out of respect: "... por el decoro que se debe guardar a las mujeres que tienen hijos no legítimos sino naturales, como yo lo soy, pues que nací de soltero y soltera, no diré más de que fue tan limpia que no pierde por ella mi linaje"<sup>20</sup> ["... for the decorum that women should guard who have not illegitimate, but natural children, which I am, since I was born of single persons. I will not say more than that she was so pure that I do not lose my lineage on account of her"]. This language, though deliberately nebulous, does, in fact, correspond with the fact that both María, a woman of noble Portuguese blood, and Diego were unmarried at the time of Luis's conception.

In asserting his untainted lineage, Luis's insistence on his rank as an *hijo natural* on the surface smacks of defending illegitimacy in a society that by both secular and canon law condemned illicit sexual unions outside the bounds of legal marriage. But his unabashed declaration points to the fact that extramarital unions and their fruits were both commonplace, and to varying degrees accepted due to important distinctions in Spanish law regarding illegitimacy. While English law, for instance, made no differentiation between degrees of bastardy, Spanish law did. It delimited two basic categories of irregular births: *hijos bastardos* (bastard children), those born of parents legally unable to marry; and *hijos naturales* (natural children), those who were conceived by unmarried parents, who otherwise suffered no legal impediment to lawful marriage. The category of *hijo bastardo* was further refined according to the type of sin committed by the parents: *adulterinos* were offspring of an affair where at least one partner was married; violating the rules of consanguinity produced *incestuosos*; and the child of at least one parent bound by religious vows carried the burden of the *sacrilegos*. These nuances meant that establishing one's status as an *hijo natural*, instead of a mere *hijo bastardo*, did matter.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Andrés, "El Arcediano," 90–91 for assignation of Luis de Castilla's birthdate and parentage: The full text of the letter is transcribed in the appendix, where the pertinent passage appears on p. 138. Regarding modern scholarship and the recognition of Diego as Luis's father, see Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> In Luis's case, his vehement defense of his birthright as an *hijo natural* overlooked a rather

The category of *hijo natural* provided a place for illegitimate children that did not render them outcast from family or society. It frequently, though not necessarily, preserved for them the rank and station of their parents, particularly owing to the common practice whereby such youths were raised in the households of other family members. As stated succinctly by Coolidge, "The fact that people could be legitimated created a space within canon and civil law where women and men could recreate their social and legal identities to accommodate their own needs and compensate for past mistakes or irregularities."<sup>23</sup> In other words, *hijos naturales* were technically viewed as children born of the sin of fornication. Nevertheless, ecclesiastical and secular sexual mores, not to mention practical application of legal statutes, exhibited considerable flexibility. In early modern Spain, mechanisms existed for tolerating illicit passion by integrating, rather than ostracizing, these progeny.

Part of overcoming the taint of illegitimacy included highlighting the otherwise illustrious nature of one's parentage. Luis could ably prove a distinguished paternal line, since Diego had received a papal dispensation of legitimacy and was a well-known, respected figure. On the part of his shadowy maternal line, Luis felt it necessary to defend not only his mother's unmarried status to remove suspicions of adultery, but also to proclaim her nobility and *limpieza* (freedom from the taint of *converso* or *morisco* ancestry). In the end, Luis's failure to seek a dispensation of legitimacy prior to soliciting a high-ranking post, rather than merely his illegitimacy alone, became a factor that contributed to his inability to secure the position he desired.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding this setback, Luis continued to serve the crown in Italy, and received a dispensation to become an ordained priest in 1604—he was hardly cast in ignominy from the ranks of the elite.

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inconvenient truth: by 1540, Diego must have already taken minor orders, tipping his son precariously toward the realm of the *hijo sacrilego*, a potentially much more problematic status. For explanation of the varying degrees of illegitimacy appearing in Castilian law, see Grace Coolidge, "A Vile and Abject Woman: Noble Mistresses, Legal Power, and the Family in Early Modern Spain," *Journal of Family History* 32, 3 (2007): 195–214; here 201.

<sup>23</sup> Grace Coolidge, "A Vile and Abject Woman," 196. Coolidge examines the lives of 43 mistresses of noblemen, of whom twelve were noblewomen. See also Vaquero Serrano, "María de Mendoza y de la Cerda," who notes multiple Mendoza hijos naturales found in family residences. For comparative studies on the topic of illegitimacy in the early modern period, see also Thomas Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), and Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Comments of one of the king's secretaries suggests that Luis should have attended to this detail prior to seeking the post, indicating that dispensations were still available and those wishing to advance should take care to obtain one. For a discussion of Luis's failed efforts to gain a seat on the Consejo or the Roman Rota and his subsequent career, see Andrés, "El arcediano," 102–05.

The care with which each member of the family sought to construct an unblemished identity indicates that they all recognized the complications that an open breach of moral codes could create for their social status. They therefore decided to exploit, rather than disregard, prescriptive ideals. Diego and María sought to shield Luis and themselves from undue scrutiny by engaging accepted modes of piety, such as charitable patronage, all the while maintaining meaningful contact with him as they safeguarded his future. After the death of his parents, Luis found it necessary to defend his questionable past by drawing upon the rhetoric of honorable birth as an *hijo natural* of esteemed parents with untainted lineages. Even if normative precepts did not necessarily prevent transgressive acts, the language of honor they contained nevertheless provided tools for constructing idealized identities.

By outwardly embracing prescriptive recommendations, they found ways to have highly respectable public lives as individuals and at least a nominally satisfying private life as a family: Diego clearly did not abandon María or Luis; María did not lose all contact with her son and likely helped secure his post in Cuenca; and Luis surely knew the details of his parentage and presumably maintained a reasonably close relationship with both mother and father throughout his youth and beyond. This preservation of family, albeit clandestinely, suggests that in the post-Tridentine period, issues of illegitimacy could require prudent negotiation in order to achieve successful outcomes for parents and children alike.

The fidelity of Diego and Luis to María, along with the family's sense of unity, while difficult to assess during María's lifetime for want of explicit documentation, becomes particularly clear upon her death. The funerary strategies embarked upon by the three indicate that while they took utmost caution to mask their relationship from the potentially disapproving eyes of their society, they sought an eternity as a family before the eyes of God. In order to initiate their plan, María left behind what can be judged in hindsight as deliberately terse testamentary instructions for her burial, entrusted to her executor, Diego. The directives of her will bear little resemblance to the final outcome of the project. For this reason, modern art historians give Diego de Castilla the majority of the credit for the re-edification of the chapel at Santo Domingo el Antiguo. However, the absence of clear written directives from María is a documentary silence that nonetheless speaks quite loudly of her desires to exercise patronage, and thus bears closer consideration.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For women and patronage activities in Italy, see Catherine King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy ca. 1300–1550* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). For the activities of widows in particular, see *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison Levy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), particularly the following articles: Holly Hurlburt, "Individual Fame and Family Honor: The Tomb of Dogaressa Agnese da Mosto Venier," 129–44;

María's sole concrete stipulation for her physical interment required burial in the central chapel of a convent or monastery, free of any other burials or coats of arms other than those she might designate. Due to her many years of residence at Santo Domingo, María surely desired burial there. At the same time, she must have known that the convent already had bodies under the floor of its cramped, poorly-lit chapel. Thus, on her deathbed, María made arrangements at another convent, the Madre de Dios, where she had family connections via her sister-in-law, Juana de Mendoza, who had professed there, and with the institution's foundress, the distantly related Saint Beatriz de Silva. While this course of action appears on the surface to be a hasty marriage of convenience, María and Diego in all probability had already devised a scheme to ensure the realization of a careful plan to bring the family together in a burial chapel of their own design.

Diego attended to María's wish, depositing her remains at Madre de Dios until he and the nuns ironed out the final negotiations regarding perpetual demands for mass cycles. But when talks broke down, the prioress at Santo Domingo el Antiguo sprang to action, offering her institution as María's resting place, despite its current unsuitability. Diego seized on a solution: the demolition and re-edification of the convent chapel, to which the nuns quickly agreed. They cut a deal, whereby Diego would handle all the arrangements for building a fully funded and equipped chapel on new ground to avoid disturbing old burial sites. Theoretically, María's estate would pay for the entire project, while the convent would have to

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Laura D. Gelfand, "Margaret of Austria and the Encoding Power in Patronage: The Funerary Foundation at Brou," 145–60; and Stephanie Fink De Backer, "Constructing Convents in Sixteenth-Century Castile: Toledan Widows and Patterns of Patronage," 177–94. Now see also Britta-Juliane Kruse, *Witwen: Kulturgeschichte eines Standes in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007). For an overview of issues surrounding women and patronage, see Cynthia Lawrence, "Introduction," *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, ed. Cynthia Lawrence (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 1–20. This collection contains numerous articles relevant to issues concerning women's patronage activities in the context of funerary or convent settings. See, for example, Alexandra Carpino, "Margaret of Austria's Funerary Complex at Brou," 37–52 and Marilyn R. Dunn, "Spiritual Philanthropists: Women as Convent Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Rome," 154–88. Carolyn Valone points to women's choice of architecture as a mechanism for the public expression of personal concerns in "Roman Matrons as Patrons: Various Views of the Cloister Wall," *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 65–85. For issues of patronage related to concerns about familial commemoration and continuity regarding Spain in particular, see Jodi Bilinkoff, "Elite Widows and Religious Expression in Early Modern Spain: the View from Avila," *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (London: Longman, 1999), 181–92. See also Allyson Poska and Elizabeth Leffeldt, who summarize the motivations of benefactors at female monastic institutions, noting spiritual imperatives along with desires to publicly announce familial wealth and status, "Redefining Expectations: Women and the Church in Early Modern Spain," *Women and Religion in Old and New Worlds*, ed. Susan Dinan and Barbara Myers (New York and London: Routledge, 2001): 21–42; here 31.



assume the costs of the structure's maintenance in perpetuity. Within four months, María's remains returned to Santo Domingo el Antiguo to await their final placement in the nave of the convent chapel, directly in front of the main altar on the side of the altar of the Epistle, where they continue to rest today.<sup>41</sup>

It is possible that Diego merely reacted to circumstances and by chance brought María back to Santo Domingo el Antiguo. Conversely, the series of events that transpired assuredly had been calculated in advance, as both parties had intimate knowledge both of the convent and the proclivities of the sisters. By threatening the nuns with the loss of their benefactress, then dangling before them the prospects of a glorious new edifice with attendant incomes to support funeral masses, the family, not merely Diego, created an opportunity to construct a safe haven that at once answered to a set of intertwined demands: the personal desire for family togetherness, the social imperative of displaying status, and the spiritual necessity of gaining salvation.

Diego drew up exacting contracts to govern the elaborate and expensive construction program. He hired the acclaimed Toledan architect Nicolás de Vergara for initial design drafts and service as the master contractor. Juan de Herrera, famed for his work on Philip II's Escorial, made a few minor modifications. Over the space of three years, the new convent church rose to impressive and elegantly-proportioned heights, with its costly decorative appointments crafted by Toledo's best artisans. Santo Domingo el Antiguo became home not only to innovative architecture, but also new trends in painting. Diego put Luis, then resident in Italy, in charge of hiring an artist who would bring to Toledo the fashion for all things Italian witnessed most clearly in Philip II's taste for Titian. Thanks to his connections with the Farnese Palace, where El Greco resided at the time, Luis convinced the artist to come to Spain for what would become his first major altarpiece commission.<sup>42</sup>

At his son's behest, Diego hired El Greco to paint the *retablos* over the main and collateral altars, working in conjunction with the Toledan sculptor Juan Bautista Monegro.<sup>43</sup> Mann notes the continuity existing between the "Trinity" found at

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<sup>41</sup> For a narrative version of the course of events based on a close reading and transcriptions of relevant archival documents, see González Martín, "Doña María de Silva," 32–45.

<sup>42</sup> Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 20–23. José Manuel Pita Andrade notes the significance of Luis's involvement in the commission and states " . . . El Greco's pictorial transformation in Spain came about largely thanks to the opportunity he had in Toledo to execute altarpieces on a grand scale." See "El Greco in Spain," *El Greco: Identity and Transformation*, ed. José Álvarez Lopera (Madrid: Museo Thyssen Bornemisza, 1999): 131–63; here 136.

<sup>43</sup> See Verardo García Rey, "El Deán . . . Segunda Parte," 40–52 for specific details regarding designs, artisans and artists. Mann reiterates much of the technical information provided by García Rey, but adds detail to the discussion of the iconographic scheme, in *El Greco and his Patrons*, 23–44. For a discussion of the contract negotiations, see Jonathan Brown, "El Greco and Toledo," *El Greco of Toledo* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 94–98.

Santo Domingo and El Greco's Roman work, in particular his early "Pietà."<sup>44</sup> In Italy, Luis may have seen this piece, whose passionate gestures conveyed the closeness between the sorrowful Virgin and her son. The image may have initially drawn Luis to El Greco, as it evoked the poignant nature of the concealed yet profound love María held for her own child. The needs of both artist and patrons meshed. El Greco's status as a foreigner had limited his ability to garner major commissions at Rome. At the same time, Diego and Luis sought a painter who would bring to life a vision that melded their theological interests in spiritual reform and the personal needs of mother, father, and son for public familial self-fashioning and private emotional expression.

Diego held tight reigns over the thematic content of the chapel's decorative scheme. For the central altar scenes, Diego directed El Greco to execute the four events fundamental to the Tridentine theology of salvation, a program consistent with a funerary chapel devoted to the deliverance of the souls buried within it [Figures 1 and 2].<sup>45</sup> Mann's work provides an exemplary study of Diego de Castilla's role as El Greco's patron, explaining, in particular, the connection between the dean's theological preoccupations and the *retablo* images. However, less attention is given to the personal connections between Diego, Luis, and María that surely also played an influential role.

For instance, relationships between confessor and confessant often included careful and considered discussion and debate over theological issues. Elite Castilian women routinely engaged in such conversations, although in most instances their voices were not directly recorded. Thus Mann's assertions regarding Diego's theological interests likely relate to positions he and María shared, developed over the course of their lifelong association. El Greco's creative vision served as the mechanism that Diego harnessed to harmonize the potential dissonances produced by his illegitimate family and give voice to his otherwise silent dialogue with María. The *retablo* became the safe context to express intimate passions within the framework of broadly accepted socio-religious forms and themes. Indeed, the tension produced by answering to the multiple demands required by this project may have inspired, at least in part, El Greco to contrive the innovative solutions for which his early work in Toledo is widely appreciated.

Above the Altar of the Gospel, Jerome, Diego's patron saint, stands in the foreground for the scene depicting the Birth of Christ in "The Adoration of the Shepherds."<sup>46</sup> While the avocation of Jerome clearly resonates with the details of

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<sup>44</sup> See Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> A number of the images currently *in situ* are in fact copies. For a discussion of the dispersal of El Greco's altarpieces, see Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, "On the Reconstruction of El Greco's Dispersed Altarpieces," *El Greco of Toledo*, 150–54.

<sup>46</sup> The original painting now resides with a private collector in the Emilio Botín Sands collection. The

Diego's upbringing in a Hieronymite monastery, it may also relate to Jerome's special relationship with female followers and supporters, notably the widow, Furia, to whom he addressed a famous epistle consistently cited by early modern moralists. Diego, like Jerome, had enjoyed particularly close companionship with widows: his formative years under the guidance of his aunt; and a bond throughout his adulthood with María de Silva. Mann's suggestion that the supplicating, yet noble image of Jerome in the scene is indeed a portrait of don Diego, further confirms the identification the Dean held with his patron saint.<sup>46</sup>

The beckoning gesture of Jerome *cum* Diego asks the viewer to behold the wonder of the Holy Family, which for Diego had a parallel in the birth of Luis to María. God's grace had sanctified the birth of the Christ child and granted purity to Mary. Hence, in the decoration above the side of the altar at which he was interred, Diego seems to plead for a blessing, or at the very least, that forgiveness be granted to his own family. The fusion of divine purity and humanity represented by both the Virgin and the Christ-child not only propounded central tenets of Tridentine theology, but also held particular relevance for a family that had transgressed this holy ideal, yet at the same time sought salvation through honoring it.

If the "Adoration" emphasized Christ's humanity, its corresponding image above the altar of the Gospel, "The Resurrection," focused on His divinity [Figure 3]. This scene is presented by the gesturing St. Ildefonsus, the most popular of Toledan saints during the sixteenth century, whose depiction here bears a strong resemblance to Archbishop Carranza. Mann dwells quite insistently on the links between the beleaguered Archbishop and Ildefonsus in the image, which were made in a conscious effort to rally support for a prelate whose orthodoxy had been called into question. As such, "The Resurrection" functioned as pro-Carranza propaganda, and thus primarily concerned Diego's own political battles.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to its propagandistic elements, this image holds theological significance with regard to the celebration of the Mass. It is via the re-enactment of the Resurrection at the sacrament's end that all Christians might receive the gift of eternal salvation.<sup>47</sup> The prospect of salvation in the context of a funerary chapel spoke to all Christians, but held particular comfort for a family that although rent by sinful sexuality, had nonetheless demonstrated lives of repentance through

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image currently at the convent is a copy.

<sup>46</sup> For an explanation of Jerome as a portrait of Diego de Castilla, see Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 25. Art historians have not, however, made any mention of any parallels between the relationships between Jerome and Furia, and Diego de Castilla and María de Silva.

<sup>47</sup> Regarding the connections between Ildefonsus, Carranza, local theologians, and Castilla family interests, see Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 29–30.

<sup>47</sup> For an explanation of the theology of the Resurrection as expressed in the sixteenth-century treatise written by Bernardino de Sandoval, see Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 30.

faith and works in accordance with the dictates of the church. Whereas the familial theme of the "Adoration" touched the humanity of the relationship between Diego, María and Luis, the "Resurrection" held forth the prospect that their ever-so-human failings could nonetheless find redemption in the eyes of God.

The third element of the Eucharistic imagery central to the altar's decorative program is present in "The Trinity," the upper image above the high altar [Figure 4]. Here, God the Father receives upon his lap the sacrificed Son in a gesture that recognizes Christ's death for the sake of humanity's sins. This scene is a figural representation of the sacrifice re-enacted in the Mass when the congregants partake of the consecrated Host. Mann carefully explicates the iconographic allusions El Greco referenced in creating this picture, while pointing out a new variation in the theme of the Throne of Mercy. In this rendering, El Greco placed the dead Christ directly in the arms of the Father, where God figuratively became the Throne itself. Such a representation underscored the theological significance of Christ's sacrifice as understood by sixteenth-century Spanish theologians.<sup>48</sup>

Although Mann lucidly explains the theological message conveyed by the image and its connections with Diego's training, he makes very little of the spiritual relationship between Father and Son as it resonates with the human tie between father and son. El Greco drew inspiration for his rendering from other sources, among them Dürer and Michelangelo.<sup>49</sup> However, the close oversight Diego held over the project and the collaborative spirit that joined him to the painter also help explain these stylistic innovations. Precisely because Diego and Luis had publicly repressed paternal and filial emotions, the expression of the tenderness they felt found another outlet. In this image, their experience of an emotional bond on a human scale participated in the universal expression of the father-son union depicted above the altar, which in turn reiterated the affective piety that resonated throughout the entire *retablo* program. Finally, by theologically signifying the mercy all congregants should beg of God, this posture of supplication found reinforcement within the context of a funerary chapel, where the sins of the family could hope for mitigation via the intercessory power of Masses for the Dead that would be sung in their honor.<sup>50</sup>

At the central position of the main altarpiece appeared "The Assumption of the Virgin," the fourth key element in a pictorial program elucidating the theme of redemption, here emphasizing the role of Mary-as-intercessor so vital to the

<sup>48</sup> Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 32–36, provides a detailed explanation of El Greco's influences, along with the theological interpretations of the Throne of Mercy current in sixteenth-century Spanish theological treatises.

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of resonance with the work of Dürer and Michelangelo, see Brown, "El Greco and Toledo," 122–23.

<sup>50</sup> Mann, *El Greco and his Patrons*, 36, provides an explanation of the liturgy of the funerary mass as derived from Sandoval.

Tridentine Spanish church [Figure 5]. The patron name-saints of Diego (var. Iago, or James in English) and María appear in this scene as Saint James the Greater depicted in a kneeling position at the right corner of the scene, raising a supplicating hand and gazing reverently upward toward the Virgin. As with the other images in the program, the scene itself was very popular at the time and aptly fit the purposes of a funerary chapel.

It was a scene, moreover, that held meaning at a personal level for María, Diego, and Luis. According to Mann, the iconographical choices underscored Diego's needs to affirm both his lineage and his theological positions.<sup>51</sup> María, as an earthly Mary, had sheltered the illegitimate Luis from conception to adulthood. She first protected him in his infancy and later defended his interests as an adult, while she led a life of devotion to God at Santo Domingo. Not only does the countenance of El Greco's Virgin display her emotional participation in the central events of the Passion, but at the same time it conveys the grief of a mother who has lost her son, or rather, María's decision not to acknowledge Luis publicly. Once again, this image does not merely engage Diego's interests, but also incorporates themes of resounding significance to María and her personal experience of motherhood.

The decisions regarding the visual program at Santo Domingo, including depictions of Diego's patron saints, Jerome and St. James the Greater, and María's patron, the Virgin, were not particularly unusual within the context of a funerary chapel. In addition, since Diego ended up spending a large portion of his own funds on the project, his seeming usurpation of the space for his own burial via a supposed loophole in María's will, whereby she allowed her executor the option of interment in her chapel, hardly seems shocking. Finally, the hand lent by their son in the whole scheme gave good cover for Diego to name his "uncle" an honorary patron of the chapel, which became the pretext Luis used to request and receive burial at Santo Domingo, directly in front of the niche housing his father's tomb.

Did Diego and Luis take advantage of María's purportedly simplistic will to garner prestigious burials for themselves? Perhaps. Some art historians, such as Mann, accuse Diego of crassly exploiting the executorship to declaim his own hereditary ties to the legendary King Pedro of Castile, a dynasty associated with the earliest foundation of the convent, all under the pretense of glorifying the memory of María. Conversely, others, including García Rey, have blindly tended

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<sup>51</sup> Mann discusses sixteenth-century theological interpretations of the Assumption, along with Diego de Castilla's familial pretensions. Diego's distant forebear, Alfonso VI, was an ancestor of King Pedro of Castile, the purported original founder of Santo Domingo el Antiguo. Alfonso had instituted the Feast of the Assumption as the principle celebration of the Toledan cathedral as part of his efforts to assert the primacy of the Toledan See. For a full discussion, see *El Greco and his Patrons*, 36–41.

to accept Diego's extensive proclamation that the whole scheme, sealed with the prominent display of the Silva coat of arms, did nothing more than redound upon the great esteem in which he held his devout confessant.

In fact, both exercises in scholarly interpretation hold a kernel of truth. By promoting the cult of María de Silva as convent foundress and paragon of virtuous widowhood, Diego effectively removed any suspicion of her real relationship with him and Luis. Furthermore, the pictorial scheme and bold display of coats-of-arms Diego mandated served to bind the chapel and those buried within it to illustrious lineages, both his and María's; to the earliest foundation of the convent's order with the inclusion of portraits of Saints Bernard and Benedict; to the patron saint of Toledo, St. Ildefonsus; and to an orthodox interpretation of salvation. By calling on the redemptive powers of an eternal mass, offered in visual form to a merciful God, the family sought to validate in human terms a lineage rent by illicit unions and to seek forgiveness in spiritual terms for their transgressions.

In the end, this quest for legitimation was the intention not merely of Diego, but of the entire family all along. Seeking legitimacy via patronage under the cover of upholding prescriptive norms became a strategy whereby all three could place their remains in a resplendent chapel held in honor by their society, and at the same time hold up their souls to the honor of God. Here at Santo Domingo el Antiguo, layers of meaning were applied with each brush-stroke to create multivalent scenes. Images and invocations, plaster and paint—all worked in concert to consecrate the eternal fusion of the family's bodies and spirits, joining human emotion and spiritual devotion, and thus legitimizing illicit love at Santo Domingo el Antiguo.



Fig. 1: Domenico Theotokópoulos (El Greco), Retablo and Side Altars, 1577–1579. Santo Domingo de Silos, “el Antiguo” de Toledo. Photography © Santo Domingo de Silos, “el Antiguo” de Toledo



Fig. 2: Domenico Theotokópoulos (El Greco), Main Altar and Retablo, 1577.  
Santo Domingo de Silos, "el Antiguo" de Toledo. Photography © Santo  
Domingo de Silos, "el Antiguo" de Toledo





Fig. 3: Domenico Theotokópoulos (El Greco), *The Resurrection of Christ*, 1577–1579. Oil on canvas, 210 x 128 cm. Santo Domingo de Silos, “el Antiguo” de Toledo. Photography © Santo Domingo de Silos, “el Antiguo” de Toledo



Fig. 4: Domenico Theotokópoulos (El Greco), *The Trinity*, 1577. Oil on canvas, 300 x 179 cm. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Photography © Museo Nacional del Prado



Fig. 5: Domenico Theotokópoulos, called El Greco, Spanish, b. Greece, 1541–1614, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1577–79, Oil on canvas, 403.2 x 211.8 cm (158 3/4 x 83 3/4 in.), Gift of Nancy Atwood Sprague in memory of Albert Arnold Sprague, 1906.99, The Art Institute of Chicago. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago

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## Fertilizing the French Vernacular: Procreation, Warfare, and Authorship in Jean de Meun, Jean Lemaire de Belges, and Rabelais

Those whose creative instinct is physical have recourse to women, and show their love in this way, believing that *by begetting children* they can secure for themselves an immortal and blessed memory hereafter for ever; but there are some whose creative desire is of the soul and who long to beget spiritually, not physically, the progeny which it is the nature of the soul to create and to bring to birth. If you ask what that progeny is, it is wisdom and virtue in general; of this *all poets and such craftsmen as have found out some new thing* may be said to be begetters.<sup>1</sup>

As Diotima's speech on immortality in Plato's *Symposium* exemplifies, the topos of love as a reproductive force in classical thought applies both to the necessary procreation of the species by nature and to the parallel procreation of the 'soul' in wisdom, virtue, and writing, that is the domain of poets.<sup>2</sup> Consequently metaphors of biological generative continuity were often exploited by medieval and early modern writers to convey their desire to be part of a poetic lineage of *auctores* in whose heritage to inscribe their work by *translatio studii* and *imitatio*, while at the same time giving voice to a need for the immortality of their own name. Gargantua's famous letter to his son in Rabelais's *Pantagruel* is, among other texts by a variety of contemporary authors, an emblematic expression of this desire.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay benefitted from the invaluable insights of Professors Lori Walters (Florida State University) and Nicolas Russell (Smith College). I would like to thank them for their detailed comments and suggestions. I am equally grateful to Professor Albrecht Classen (University of Arizona) for accepting this article for inclusion in the current volume. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin, 1951), 90 (208e–209a).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, transl. Willard Trask. Bollingen Series, 36 (1948; New York: Princeton University Press, 1990), 106–27 and 132–33.

<sup>3</sup> For an alternative critical perspective on this issue, see also Kathleen Llewellyn's insightful contribution to the present volume on the link between sexuality and (im)mortality in early modern French literature.

However, Diotima's dual generative force can be read on a textual level as well, namely that of a linguistic *crescite et multiplicamini* whereby the poet strives to mirror physical begetting in language. On this rhetorical and poetic level, literary language mimes the processes of biological reproduction and allows the poet to glorify authorship as linguistic procreation.

This article seeks to substantiate the connection between this authorial role in linguistic replenishment and the rise and expansion of the French vernacular in the period 1250–1550, in particular as staged against a background of belligerent threat and warfare. My analysis will focus on three authors, Jean de Meun (second half of the thirteenth century), Jean Lemaire de Belges (ca. 1473–ca. 1516), and François Rabelais (ca. 1494–1553), whose works evince the mimetic interplay between physical procreation and poetic begetting in language, and feature the author figure as the creator of a linguistic fertility in the vernacular as it is prompted by life-threatening warfare. The thematic crossroads of procreation, warfare, and authorship in the works of these authors highlights a continuity from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and allows to nuance our perspective on the author's role in the development of the French vernacular as a form of imitation of ancient authors, a role rendered iconic in the early sixteenth-century by Joachim Du Bellay's *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* (1549).

The context of warfare will enlighten the connection between procreation and authorship in the vernacular. As exemplified by the Old Testament law exempting a first-year Judaic married man from going to war “to stay home and give happiness to the wife he married” (Deuteronomy 24: 5<sup>4</sup>), the necessity of biological reproduction of the species gains importance in times of warfare. To be sure, this fertility law was a beloved commonplace predominantly for Renaissance humanists interested in marriage and offspring, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Marguerite de Navarre, and François Rabelais. The latter extensively discusses it in Chapter 6 of his *Tiers Livre*, “Pourquoy les nouveaux mariez estoient exemptz d'aller en guerre” (“Why newlyweds were exempt from going to war”).<sup>5</sup> Yet its universal notion of human procreation in times of battle should be kept in mind when analyzing in all following examples the relationship between the author's

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<sup>4</sup> “Cum acceperit homo nuper uxorem, non procedet ad bellum, nec ei quippiam necessitatis iniungetur publicae, sed vacabit absque culpa domi suae, ut uno anno laetetur cum uxore sua” (*Biblia Sacra Vulgatae Editionis* [Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos & Milan: San Paolo, 1995]). For a striking example in medieval iconography of a similar parallel between fertility and epic warfare inspired by the Old Testament, see Alexa Sand's contribution to this volume.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of Rabelais's use of the Deuteronomy passage, see Michael Screech, *The Rabelaisian Marriage: Aspects of Rabelais's Religion, Ethics and Comic Philosophy* (London: Edward Arnolds, 1958), 40–44. Erasmus refers to it in his *Encomium matrimonii* (*Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. Jean-Claude Margolin [Amsterdam: Royal Academy, 1975], vol. I–5, 390) and Marguerite de Navarre in her *Heptaméron* (see ed. Renja Salminen. *Textes littéraires français* [Geneva: Droz, 1999], 498).

role in linguistic fertility, and warfare, siege, or a general threat of belligerent destructive forces.

Jean de Meun's allegorical character Genius will form an important case in point. The latter's role as a fertilizing author figure in the continuation of Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose* (1270–1280)<sup>6</sup> merits a comparison to that of Rabelais's figure Diogenes, whose apparently futile barrel-rolling in the *Prologue* to the *Tiers Livre* (1546) emblemizes the role of the author as a creator of linguistic fecundity. In this context, Jean Lemaire de Belges's use of the Genius figure in his *La Concorde des deux langages* (1511) warrants equal consideration. A *rhétoriqueur* involved in debates on the vernacular, Jean Lemaire de Belges gives the Genius character a prominent role in celebrating the French and Italian tongues. All three writers stage the author figure as a linguistic reproducer under circumstances of both real and metaphorical warfare. In Jean de Meun, physical and poetic procreation are closely related to allegorical combat (the siege of Love's castle), a connection reiterated in Jean Lemaire's and Rabelais's authorial *personae* Genius and Diogenes, who assure linguistic fertility in the vernacular on a par with the necessary procreation of the species in the context of war (i.e., the precarious situation of early sixteenth-century France under constant menace from outside forces).

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The resemblances between the *Roman de la Rose* and Rabelais's oeuvre as a whole, in particular with regard to the larger themes of sexuality and regeneration, have not escaped critical attention.<sup>7</sup> For the earliest critics, Jean de Meun was Rabelais's precursor in "naturalism": both represented positivist glorifiers of the natural universe and of man's dignifying scientific relationship to the latter.<sup>8</sup> At the level

<sup>6</sup> See Kevin Brownlee, "Jean de Meun and the Limits of Romance: Genius as Rewriter of Guillaume de Lorris," *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee (Hanover and London: University Press of New England for Dartmouth College, 1985), 114–34.

<sup>7</sup> See in particular Hope Glidden, "Regeneration and Writing in the *Roman de la Rose* and *Gargantua and Pantagruel*," *Contending Kingdoms. Historical, Psychological, and Feminist Approaches to the Literature of Sixteenth-Century England and France*, ed. Marie-Rose Logan and Peter Rudnytsky (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 69–89.

<sup>8</sup> Marcel Françon, "Jean de Meun et les origines du naturalisme de la Renaissance," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 59, 3 (1944): 624–45; Louis Thuasne, *Villon et Rabelais. Notes et commentaires*. Rpt. (1911; Geneva: Slatkine, 1969); Gustave Lanson, *Histoire illustrée de la littérature française*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1923), 106. See also Silvio Baridon's *Preface* to Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Roman de la Rose. Dans la version attribuée à Clément Marot*. *Testi e documenti di letteratura moderna*, I, Vol. 1 (Milano and Varese: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1957), 11–55.

of narrative structure striking continuities, even if shared by other works of the Western canon, should indeed retain our attention. Both works are obviously quest tales, specifically a lover's quest for a partner. In Jean's text, the Lover's itinerary to the object of his burning desire is interspersed with a series of digressive speeches which create an open-ended structure of debate.<sup>9</sup> This structure shows a remarkable resemblance in particular to Panurge's burning desire to find a spouse and procreate in the *Tiers Livre*, a quest which leads him along a long litany of contradicting and increasingly burlesque consultations that only add to his perplexity. Moreover, in both works the open-ended narrative structure of the love quest mimics the unrelenting sexual desire for physical progeny (in Jean's poem the goal of the Lover's impregnating of the rose, and in Rabelais's novel Panurge's obsession for legitimate offspring through marriage), while staging the text itself as a product of linguistic fertility.<sup>10</sup> Finally, both authors deal in a remarkably analogous way with postlapsarian human sexuality as governed by the Biblical injunction *crescite et multiplicamini*.<sup>11</sup> We need but to think of the similarity between Jean's priest-like Genius urging the forces of Love to procreate while dressed up in his sacerdotal garments, and Rabelais's anti-monk Brother John exhorting Panurge to exercise relentlessly his male organ in answer to the "increase and multiply" command from Genesis, and we are struck by the similar cosmic-comic staging of human sexual reproduction.<sup>12</sup>

While Rabelais's work contains no concrete textual references to the *Roman de la Rose* (though he almost certainly knew the work), the influence of the *Roman de la Rose* on early sixteenth-century critical thought on poetry and literary language is beyond a doubt considerable and the work was widely read and studied until well into that century. From its wealth of manuscripts in the fourteenth century, its various prose versions and moralizations, and its more than twenty late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century editions, to the *Querelle de la Rose* and its influence on poets such as Guillaume de Machaut, François Villon, and Clément Marot, it is clear that the text was seen as the embodiment of poetry itself.<sup>13</sup> The

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Françon also discusses Jean Lemaire de Belges as part of this same lineage.

<sup>9</sup> This would find a structural parallel in Heinrich Wittenwiler's allegorical romance, *Der Ring* (ca. 1400); see Albrecht Classen's Introduction to this volume and his contribution. The point being that the theme developed here would easily find numerous parallels all over Europe in the late Middle Ages.

<sup>10</sup> See also Alan Gunn, *The Mirror of Love. A Reinterpretation of "The Romance of the Rose"* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech Press, 1952).

<sup>11</sup> For a reading of the *Rose* as an allegory of the Fall, see John Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose. A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

<sup>12</sup> For a relevant perspective on the link between sexuality and fertility (both textual and metatextual) in courtly literature preceding the *Roman de la Rose*, namely Marie de France's *Lais*, see also Molly Robinson Kelly's contribution to the present volume.

<sup>13</sup> Sylvia Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception and*

text was, moreover, considered a key document of linguistic heritage for sixteenth-century poetry in the vernacular, as we see in the *Exposition morale*, the preface to a modernized 1526 edition attributed to Clément Marot.<sup>14</sup> Stephen Nichols rightly stresses Marot's main goal as that of rendering old language intelligible for modern readers. The importance of this effort should be seen in a larger context of strengthening a vernacular that was not yet considered poetically mature enough "with the authority of a respected literary heritage."<sup>15</sup> The critical reception of the *Rose*, in particular Jean's part, as an exemplary work of poetry and a source of linguistic plenitude from which the rising vernacular could highly benefit is also reflected in the prominent place Jean de Meun holds in the two most important sixteenth-century theoretical texts on French language and poetry. In his *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* (1549), Joachim Du Bellay calls the *Rose* the 'blueprint' of the French language ("une premiere imaigne de la Langue Francoyse"),<sup>16</sup> and in his *Art poétique français* (1548) Thomas Sébillet places Jean de Meun in a lineage coming from the Italian poets Dante and Petrarch to Alain Chartier and Jean Lemaire de Belges.<sup>17</sup>

Both theoreticians cite Jean Lemaire de Belges in this context, which is all the more significant when, in the following, we see how this *rhétoriqueur* uses the *Rose* as a source of vernacular replenishment against a background of nation-building: Jean Lemaire borrows the Genius character from Jean de Meun to stage it as a poetically fertilizing author figure in a context of belligerent threats to the French nation and vernacular. This particular context of poetic reproduction of the vernacular under menace of war in early modern France sheds light on Rabelais's

*Manuscript Transmission*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 16 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Pierre-Yves Badel, *Le Roman de la Rose au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Étude de la réception de l'oeuvre*. Publications romanes et françaises, CLIII (Geneva: Droz, 1980); Karl Uitti, "From Clerc to Poète: The Relevance of the Romance of the Rose to Machaut's World," *Machaut's World: Science and Art in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Madeleine Pelner Cosman and Bruce Chandler. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 314 (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1978), 209–16; David Hult, "La fortune du *Roman de la Rose* à l'époque de Clément Marot," *Clément Marot «Prince des poètes français», 1496–1996. Actes du Colloque international de Cahors en Quercy, 21–25 mai 1996*, ed. Gérard Defaux and Michel Simonin. Colloques, congrès, et conférences sur la Renaissance, VIII (Paris: Champion, and Geneva: Slatkine, 1997), 143–56.

<sup>14</sup> Clément Marot, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Abel Grenier, vol. 2 (Paris: Garnier, 1938), 414–16. The attribution to Marot is highly debated (cf. Hult, "La fortune du *Roman de la Rose*," 144).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Nichols, "Marot, Villon and the *Roman de la Rose*: A Study in the Language of Creation and Re-Creation," *Studies in Philology* 64, 1 (1967): 42–43. This article appeared as the second of a two-article series. The first was published under the same title in *Studies in Philology* 63, 2 [1966]: 135–43).

<sup>16</sup> Joachim Du Bellay, *La deffence et l'illustration de la langue francoyse*, ed. Henri Chamard (Paris: Didier, 1948), 92.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Sébillet, *Art poétique français*, included in Sébillet, Aneau, Peletien, Fouquelin, Ronsard, *Traité de poétique et de rhétorique de la Renaissance*, ed. Francis Goyet (1932; Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1990), 54



*Prologue* to the *Tiers Livre*. Although Rabelais does not explicitly refer to the *Concorde*, he plainly establishes his knowledge of Jean Lemaire de Belges's works: in Chapter 30 of *Pantagruel*, he respectfully places Jean Lemaire de Belges in the "Champs Elisées" (where he is in the company of many great minds of the past, such as Alexander, Cicero, Hannibal, Lancelot, Villon and, not to forget, Diogenes!) and thus highlights the pivotal role of this 'second Jean' ("Jean le maire", i.e., "the major") between the *Rose* and himself.<sup>18</sup> Although the critical discourse on the *Rose* focuses on authors of poetic works, Rabelais's staging of Diogenes as an author figure begetting literary language in prose during the siege of Corinth in the *Prologue* can be analyzed against the same background of early sixteenth-century French critical thinking on vernacular replenishment inspired by the *Rose*.<sup>19</sup>

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A first example of this intersection between warfare, procreation, and the author's role is a passage in Jean's *Rose* that combines an elaborate scene of allegorical combat with a direct intervention of the authorial voice (the narrator addressing the reader).

During the conquest of the *Rose*, the moment is one of high tension and turning tides. After an initial attempt to touch the *Rose*, the Lover has been thrown out of the *Rose*'s castle by Danger, Fear, and Shame (14778–807).<sup>20</sup> In the ensuing combat

<sup>18</sup> The reference occurs in Epistémon's account of the afterlife, after he has miraculously been brought back to life by Panurge (François Rabelais, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Mireille Huchon and François Moreau. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade [Paris: Gallimard, 1994], 321–27).

<sup>19</sup> A clear-cut distinction between poetry and prose as we know it now did not exist in sixteenth-century literary theory, which defined poetry as a 'second rhetoric' (cf. Graham Castor, *Pléiade Poetics: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Thought and Terminology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964], Chap. II "Poetry as the Art of Second Rhetoric"). Moreover, in his *Temple de Cupido* (1538), an allegorical poem highly indebted both to the *Roman de la rose* and to *La Concorde des deux langages*, Clément Marot writes that the 'sacred' texts of the Temple, namely the works of Ovid, Chartier, Petrarch, and the *Roman de la rose*, are read both in rhyme and in prose: "Ovidius, maître Alain Charretier, / Pétrarque, aussi le *Roman de la rose*, / Sont les missels, bréviaire et psautier / Qu'en ce saint temple on lit en rime et en prose" ("Ovid, master Alain Chartier, / Petrarch, and the *Romance of the Rose*, / Are the missals, breviaries and psalters / That one reads in this sacred temple, both in rhyme and in prose); Clément Marot, *Le Temple de Cupido*, vv. 323–26, in *L'Adolescence clémentine*, ed. Frank Lestringant (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 65. The English translation is mine. The casual way in which Marot lists these names and makes "*Rose*" rime with "prose" suggests that the opposition between literary discourse in prose and in verse did not play a significant role in how he assesses the importance of these poetic predecessors for French authors. Moreover, as we will see, Jean Lemaire de Belges's *Concorde* features a combination of verse and prose.

<sup>20</sup> All quotations are from Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy. Les Classiques français du Moyen Age, 92 (Paris: Champion, 1973). For the English, I use

Love's forces are so severely threatened by defeat (15273–628) that they need to call for a truce and request Venus's help. A shift of narrative point of view takes place at the same time.<sup>21</sup> The "je"-Lover, who had been an active participant in the action so far, falls back into a motionless, almost paralyzed state of contemplation:

Je, qui estoie pris ou laz  
ou Amors les autres enlance,  
*sanz moi remuer de la place*  
*regardaie le tornoiement*  
qui conmença trop asprement; . . .  
Et je, qui *d'esgarder ne fin*

leur semblant et leur contenance  
sui mout dolanz de l'aliance. (15078–92)

[Without moving from the spot, I, who was captured in the net where Love binds others, watched the tournament that began very fiercely . . . I didn't stop watching their appearance, and I was very sad over their alliance; 257]

Although the Lover will retain his passive status of an allegorical non-combatant until the end of the poem (all fighting will be done by the barons), it is striking that Jean seizes this particular opportunity to impose his authorial voice of poet-narrator, and directly addresses the reader: "Des or *vanrons* a la bataille" / *s'orroiz* comment chascuns bataille. / Or *antandez*, leal amant" (15103–05; "From now on we will come to the battle, and you will hear how each one fights. Listen now, loyal lovers;" 257). The falling back of the protagonist-narrator on a position of impotent bystander is remedied by the poet-narrator's powerful entry on the narrative stage. The latter first clarifies some fundamental aspects of the author-reader relationship: he defines his work as an art of love "souffisant" for the reader, reassures the latter to have confidence in the author's capacities to elucidate obscure passages ("g'esclarcirai ce qui vous trouble" [15116, "I will clarify what confuses you;" 258]); and gives an apologetic justification for the satirical discourses of Old Woman, Friend, and False-Seeming that precede his entry.<sup>22</sup>

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Charles Dahlberg's translation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). Verse numbers from Lecoy and page numbers from Dahlberg are indicated between brackets. Emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> The diegetic speech situation in Jean's *Rose* is subject to several shifts of emphasis between the "je" as narrator-protagonist (Amant) and the "je" as poet-narrator (Brownlee, "Jean de Meun and the Limits of Romance," 116–17).

<sup>22</sup> On the discourse of Old Woman, see also Karen Pratt, "De *vetula*: the Figure of the Old Woman in Medieval French Literature," *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 321–42; here 337–39.

This self-justifying authorial metadiscourse prepares the reader for the artistic achievement of the ensuing battle description. At first reading, Jean's *descriptio* faithfully follows the traditional scheme of a classical *psychomachia*, i.e., of opposite allegorical forces fighting against each other (a tournament of Openness vs. Resistance, Shame vs. Pity, Boldness vs. Fear, etc.) while their weaponry functions as an extension of their allegorical values (Resistance's shield is made of brutality [15289]; Openness's lance is from the forest of Cajolery [15298]). On closer inspection, however, in contrast to the preceding lengthy encyclopedic discourses, this segment, opened by the poet-narrator's energetic entry, purely emblemizes authorial craft. The author's digression, lacking any other purpose than the pleasure of *descriptio*, becomes a veritable celebration of writing.

Jean's poetic amplification in the form of gratuitous metaphorical exaggerations of the vocabulary of allegorical weaponry should particularly retain our attention:

Honte porte une grant espee,  
bele et bien fete et bien tranpee,  
Qu'ele forja douteusement  
De soussi d'aperçoivement.  
Fort targe avoit, qui fu nomee  
Doute de male renomee:

De cel fust l'avoit ele fete  
*Mainte langue ot ou bort portrete.*

(15431–37)

[Shame carried a large sword, beautiful, well made, and well tempered, one that she had forged in fear from the concern of being found out. She had a strong targe, named Fear-of-a-Bad-Reputation, for she had made it of that sort of wood. On the borders there was many a tongue portrayed; 262]

The reference to the languages inscribed on the edges of Shame's shield is one of several instances of metaphorical amplification that evoke connotations of linguistic and poetic abundance in the description of this allegorical weaponry and the psychological values related to them. The descriptions of the combatants' shields are a case in point: the shield of Skillful Concealment is "en leu repost / onques geline en tel ne post, / bordez de seüres alees / et de revenues celees" (15465–68; "made of a hidden place where no chicken ever laid an egg; it was bordered with safe outings and secret returns;" 263), whereby the reference to the egg-laying chicken evokes a burlesque sense of biological reproduction, and the shield of Boldness is bordered with unrestrained abandonment as a weapon against death: "*Despit de mort estoit nomez. / Bordez fu d'abandonemant / a touz perilz*" (15510–13; "its name was Contempt-of-Death, and it was bordered with wild abandon to all dangers;" 263). Most striking is the description of Openness's shield:

si rot, par grant devocion,  
 de toute supplicacion  
 escu, c'onques ne fu de mains,  
 bordé de jointures de mains,  
 de promesses, de convenances,  
 par seremanz et par fiances  
 couloré trop mignotement  
 vos deïssiez certainement  
 que *Largece* le li bailla  
 et qu'el le *paint* et *antailla*,  
 tant sambloit bien s'estre de s'œuvre

(15301–11)

[She also held, with great devotion, a shield of every supplication, no less strong, bordered with handclasps, promises, agreements, oaths, and engagements, all colored very daintily. You would have said certainly that Generosity had given it to her, painted and shaped it, so much did it seem to be of her workmanship; 260]

Jean's seemingly arbitrary addition that Openness's lavishly ornamented shield seems the work of Generosity's ("*Largesse*") painting and sculpting is proof of the author's self-awareness of his exuberant poetic inflating. He not only grants to his poetic writing an artistic status equal to that of painters and sculptors, but, more important, locates the notion of copiousness, i.e., the bounty and plenty, hence fertility we normally associate with generosity, at the very basis of poetic production.

As noted by various commentators, Jean's exaggerations of these allegorical commonplaces at first reading merely add an ironical dimension that can be interpreted as a mocking of *psychomachia*: by overstating the puppet-like clumsiness of the struggling characters and ridiculing their allegorical value, Jean cunningly parodies allegorical warfare.<sup>23</sup> To be sure, this ironical distance strengthens Jean's detached authorial position in this passage flaunting the author's craft. However, Jean's parody of allegorical warfare also generates a poetic and linguistic *amplificatio*, or sense of abundance, that goes beyond pure *descriptio*. His metaphorical inflating of allegorical weaponry disconnects words from the objects they designate and thus surpasses the basic purpose of *enargeia* (or *ekphrasis* in a larger sense), namely to conjure up the scene mentally in the reader's visual imagination.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See the annotation of this passage in Armand Strubel's edition of the *Rose* (Les Lettres gothiques [Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992]), which provides useful references to these textual devices in other allegorical works, such as the *Armeüre du Chevalier*, the *Chevalier de Dieu* and Huon de Méry's *Le Tournoiement d'Antechrist*.

<sup>24</sup> See the entries *enargeia* and *ekphrasis* in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), s.v. For a

Although the most famous *ekphrasis* of a warrior's shield, that of Achilles in the *Iliad* with its bountiful cities, lavish feasts, and fertile fields certainly reminds us that exuberance and *copia* are part of *enargeia*, Homer's language still allows for a precise visualization in the reader's mind. Jean's description of Openness's shield, however, no longer yields a mental picture: after all, how could the reader imagine a shield abundantly ornamented with promises, agreements, oaths, and engagements? The only purpose of this amplified allegory is to generate a sense of abundance through poetic language. Incidentally, while we can only speculate if Jean had Achilles's shield in mind, his metaphorical amplification is strikingly associated with the weapon of defense, thus suggesting that the author's fertile poetic abundance mimetically functions as a life-saving 'shield' against death as inflicted by warfare.

In these passages the Lover-narrator's incapacity to contribute to the combat between Love's barons seeking to obtain the Rose and the defenders of the Castle implies a twofold impotence,<sup>25</sup> i.e., the inability to participate in active combat on a narrative level, and his failure to reproduce in the context of the allegorical conquest of the lady necessary for biological reproduction. Hence the Lover is left in a position even less enviable than that of the first-year married men of the Judaic tribes who could at least contribute to the war effort by making babies. The shift to the poet-narrator's perspective mimetically remedies the Lover's physical impotence at the authorial level: the poet replaces the Lover adopting a potent authorial point of view that enables him to showcase fertile poetic and linguistic abundance in the very description of warfare. In other words, warfare within the world of the narrative fiction generates textual fecundity at the authorial level of poetic creation.

The role of the poet-narrator as a linguistic reproducer in a context of warfare can be extrapolated to the Genius character. If we focus on his function in the allegorical battle rather than on the character's larger purpose in the *Rose*,<sup>26</sup> it can

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most comprehensive analysis of *ekphrasis* in medieval literature, see Haiko Wandhoff, *Ekphrasis. Kunstbeschreibungen und virtuelle Räume in der Literatur des Mittelalters*. Trends in Medieval Philology, 3 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003). See in particular the discussion of the terminology of *evidentia* and *imaginatio* (20–30) and of the archetypal role of the *ekphrasis* of Achilles's shield in the *Iliad*'s (39–47).

<sup>25</sup> Whereas Love's forces are on the attack and the counter-forces under siege, in a larger sense Love's barons can be seen as the 'defenders' of life. In this passage, the besiegers are featured as the besieged: "Mes ne vos en mantiré ja, / l'ost qui le chastel asseja / an avoit adés le peeur" (15597–99; "However—and I will not lie to you about it—the forces that were attacking the castle were constantly getting the worst of it;" 265).

<sup>26</sup> The numerous critical studies on the Genius character, Nature's priest, focus on the discrepancy between Genius's earthly exhortations to procreate and his message of spiritual redemption for those who do, and on the consequences of that discrepancy for allegorical language and its meaning; see e.g. Sarah Kay, "Sexual Knowledge: the Once and Future Texts of the *Romance of the*

be said that Genius assumes the task of authorial fertility.<sup>27</sup> To that purpose, Jean stages another significant shift in narrative voice: as firmly as he had imposed his position as poet-narrator when the Lover was left paralyzed in the skirmishes around the castle, as decidedly the author figure leaves the stage to make place for Genius when the battle becomes one between the universal forces of Nature and Death. No preamble to a speech in the *Rose* is accompanied by such an underscored withdrawal of the authorial voice afraid to be too imposing. Thus, unlike other speeches in Jean's *Rose*, Genius's voice becomes a direct extension of that of the author:

ainz veuill ma parole *abregier*  
 por *vos oreilles alegier*,  
 car maintes foiz cil qui preesche,  
 quant briefmant ne se depeesche,  
 an fet les auditeurs aller  
 par trop prolixement parler. (19441–46)

[instead I want to shorten my account and lighten your ears; many times, when a preacher does not dispatch briefly, he makes his audience leave by being too prolix in his speaking; 321]

The transformation of the poet-narrator's voice into Genius's is emphasized by a unique staging of the oratorical setting of speaker and audience:

Genyus, san plus terme metre  
 s'est lors *por lire mieuz la letre*  
 selonc les faiz devant contez,  
 seur un grant eschaufaut montez,  
 et li baron *sidrent par terre*,  
 n'i vostrent autres sieges querre.  
 Et cil sa chartre leur desploie  
 et sa main antour soi tornoie  
 et fet signe et dit qu'il se tesent;  
 et cil, qui ses paroles plesent,

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*Rose*," *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices*, ed. Judith Still and Michael Worton (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 69–86; Daniel Poirion, *Le Roman de la Rose*. Connaissance des Lettres (Paris: Hatier, 1973), 186–98; Maureen Quilligan, "Words and Sex: the Language of Allegory in the *De planctu naturae*, the *Roman de la Rose*, and Book III of *The Fairie Queene*," *Allegorica* 2 (1977): 195–216; Winthrop Wetherbee, "The Literal and the Allegorical: Jean de Meun and the *de Planctu Naturae*," *Mediaeval Studies* 33 (1971): 264–91; id., "The Theme of Imagination in Medieval Poetry and the Allegorical Figure «Genius»," *Medievalia et Humanistica. Studies in Medieval & Renaissance Culture* 7 (1976): 45–64. See also Fleming, *The Roman de la Rose*, 207–28; Gunn, *The Mirror of Love*, 205–75 and Alastair Minnis, «*Magister amoris*»: *The Roman de la Rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> For the role of Genius as author figure, see also Brownlee, "Jean de Meun and the Limits of Romance."

s'antreguignent et s'antreboutent.  
 Atant s'apesent, si escoutent,  
*et par tex paroles comance*  
*la diffinitive santance.*

(19461–74)

[Without taking any more time, Genius then mounted a large platform, the better to read the text, according to the things told about before. The barons sat on the ground and didn't want to seek any other seats. Genius unfolded the charter, made a sign with his hand all around him, and called for silence. Those whom his words pleased looked at and nudged one another. Then they quieted down immediately and listened while the definitive sentence began; 321–22]

Within the larger thematics of the *Rose*, Genius's *sermon joyeux* is an outspoken if not desperate call for procreation of the human species: "Arez, por Dieu, arez, / et voz lignages reparez. / Se ne pansez formant d'arer, / n'est rien qui les puist reparer" (19671–64; "For God's sake, my barons, plow and restore your lineages. Unless you think on plowing vigorously, there is nothing that can restore them;" 324).<sup>28</sup> On the narrative level, the key purpose of Genius's speech is to exhort the barons into the battle that leads to the victory of the Lover's impregnation of the Rose. Yet Genius's is not a speech by an inspired commander ready to head his troops to victory. Rather, just like the author, he operates from a domain detached from the narrative level of the battle, as it is clearly stated that, right after his speech, he mysteriously withdraws to an unknown realm (20672–73; "Et Genyus s'esvanoï, / c'onques ne sorent qu'il devint" ["Genius vanished so that no one knew what had become of him;" 338]).

Unable to contribute bodily to the victory of the forces of physical fertility (the Lover impregnating the Rose), Genius in this speech affirms himself at the authorial level of poetic fertility and reproduction. Genius's battle-cry (19669; "Metrez touz voz ostiz en euvre" ["Put all your tools to work;" 324]) is an exhortation to procreate in which various metaphorical tools of fertility (hammers and anvils to forge objects; ploughs and furrows to seed and to plant) are paralleled with metaphors of fecundity in writing and reading such as the (phallic) pen and the wax tablet (its softness recalling the female sex). For instance, Genius condemns those who do not use their pen to write on the precious tablets that allow all of us to be writers and thus immortal:

cil qui des greffes n'escrivent,  
 par cui li mortel tourjorz vivent,  
*es beles tables precieuses*  
 que Nature por estre oiseuses  
 ne leur avoit pas aprestees,  
 ainz leur avoit por ce prestees

<sup>28</sup> Again, the parallels to Alexa Sand's observations in her contribution to this volume are striking.

*qui tuit i fussent escrivain  
con tuit et toutes en vivain*

(19599–606)

[those who do not write with their styluses, by which mortals live forever, on the beautiful precious tablets that Nature did not prepare for them to leave idle, but instead loaned to them in order that everyone might be a writer and that we all, men and women, might live; 323]

Genius's spectrum of metaphorical tools allows us to understand the author's procreative task as one of a universal nature (just like sex, all can participate in it) and similar to that of other craftsmen and manual laborers, such as blacksmiths and ploughmen. At the same time, Genius's examples are ultimately all metaphors and thus poetic (pro)creations of the mind, rather than physical products of the body (the offspring that needs to be guaranteed through the victory of the barons over the forces defending the castle). Thus, whereas all other allegorical characters remain on the scene of warfare (at least their departure is never specifically indicated) and can be thought to be partaking in the concrete battle, Genius's contribution, like that of the author, has been to generate poetic language as a mimetic tool to metaphorically compensate physical impotence.

In this context, it is useful to reconsider the midpoint of the conjoined texts of the *Rose's* two authors. These verses by Jean de Meun are generally recognized as highly self-reflective regarding the poem's authorship: the God of Love places Guillaume de Lorris in a long lineage of ancient love poets, and announces the coming of Jean de Meun, Love's faithful servant, to complete the poem left unfinished by Guillaume.<sup>29</sup> For our purpose, let us only focus on elements that clarify the authorial role in vernacular poetic replenishment as a parallel to physical fertility in times of warfare. First, the situation of the plot at the midpoint foreshadows Genius's speech to the barons: the God of Love's address, in which he encourages his "baronnie" of troops to listen to his "parole" (at first an exhortation to besiege the castle where Fair Welcome is captive), directly precedes the poem's first instance of serious warfare. Thus the God of Love's speech on the poem's authorship, arguably the most important moment of self-reflexive authorial meta-discourse, placed at the poem's narratively significant midpoint, is embedded in a concrete belligerent situation that reflects the poem's larger universal combat seeking the victory of the forces of physical procreation. In other words, authorship is defined under pressure of imminent life-threatening war. Second, calling to mind the necessity of physical procreation of the species during

<sup>29</sup> For the midpoint's intersection of narrative and authorial perspectives (Amor, the lover-dreamer, Guillaume, and Jean as a love-poet), see Uitti, "From *Clerc* to *Poete*," 212–13, and David Hult, "Language and Dismemberment: Abelard, Origen, and the *Romance of the Rose*," *Rethinking the «Romance of the Rose»*. *Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 101–30; here 101–03.



warfare, the God of Love locates Jean's authorial *persona* in the realm of birth. In his speech, Jean introduces himself in a threatening pugnacious situation as a *yet-to-be-born* author to take over from Guillaume and finish the poem ("Puis vendra Johans Chopinel, / . . . qui nestra seur Laire a Meün" [10535–37; "Then will come Jean Chopinel, . . . He will be born at Meung-sur-Loire;" 187]), thus affirming his authorship as a salvific and quasi messianic linguistic and poetic regeneration. Third, the God of Love links Jean's linguistic fertilization of the poem to the French vernacular constitutive of the kingdom:

si fleütera noz paroles  
par carrefors et par escoles,  
selonc le langage de France,  
par tout le regne, en audience (10611–14)

[he will, . . . so flute our words through crossroads and through schools, in the language of France, before audiences throughout the kingdom; 188]

Warfare, physical procreation of the species, and poetic regeneration by the author figure thus intersect at the poem's midpoint to stage the fertilization of the French vernacular<sup>30</sup> and to fortify Jean's authorial *persona* as a linguistic reproducer in a belligerent context. The author, born under circumstances necessitating reproduction of the species, will write a text that serves as the poetic counterpart to physical reproduction in the universal battle between life-giving and life-destroying forces, and will thus replenish the national vernacular poetically and linguistically.

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Jean Lemaire de Belges's *La Concorde des deux langages* (1511) further substantiates the literary continuity in thematics of linguistic and poetic fertilization of the vernacular in a context of belligerent menace, and the role of the author figure therein. In this both politically and linguistically important document on the French and Italian vernaculars in early sixteenth-century France,<sup>31</sup> Jean Lemaire's

<sup>30</sup> Jean's creation of French poetic *auctoritas* is discussed by Kevin Brownlee, "Orpheus' Song Re-Sung: Jean de Meun's Reworking of Metamorphoses, X," *Romance Philology* 36, 2 (1982): 201–09; Uitti, "From Clerc to Poete," 212; and David Hult, "Language and Dismemberment," 102. For a general discussion of notions of authorship in the vernacular, see also *The Idea of the Vernacular. An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280–1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor and Ruth Evans (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 3–19 and 314–30. See also Burt Kimmelman, *The Poetics of Authorship in the Later Middle Ages: The Emergence of the Modern Literary Persona*. Studies in the Humanities: Literature – Politics – Society, 21 (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), in particular 71–76.

<sup>31</sup> See Cynthia Brown, "Jean Lemaire's *La Concorde des deux langages*: The Merging of Politics,

debt to Jean de Meun is obvious. He calls him an “orateur françois . . . qui donna premierement estimation à nostre langue” (“a French orator . . . who was the first to give value to our language;” 44: 264–66),<sup>32</sup> equals him in that respect to Dante and the latter’s role for the Italian language (44: 267), and borrows three crucial allegorical characters from Jean de Meun’s poem: Genius, Danger, and Fair Welcome. The text, written in an alternation of poetry and prose, is presented as a debate on the nature of the two languages, but in reality features an allegorical pilgrimage of the first-person narrator in search of the desired concord in the *Temple de Venus* and *Temple de Minerve*.<sup>33</sup> Even if Jean Lemaire introduces Genius in the Venus temple, where the “concorde” will ultimately not be found, the sheer length of Genius’s speech (occupying 249 verses of the 616 of the *Temple de Venus*, i.e., more than a third) and the way in which it reminisces the *Rose* emphasize its key role.

Genius continues to play the complex role of his character in the *Rose*, namely a semi-pagan, semi-Christian divinity of “genital force”: as priest of the temple of Venus (15: 206) and as Archpriest, “bien acoustré d’habitz pontificaulx” (“well dressed in pontifical garment”), with Danger as deacon and Fair Welcome as subdeacon (21: 332–33; 337). In urging men to procreate (“Crée je fuz pour vous duire et guyder, / Pour procurer la vostre geniture” [“I was created to lead and guide you, / To provide you with progeny;” 29: 532–33]), he also maintains his role in the universal processes of physical regeneration: “Et de là vient que le ciel noble et monde / Aspire en terre une amour effective / De procreer tout ce qui y habunde” (“And thus it is that noble heaven and earth / Covet an industrious love on earth / In order to procreate all that lives in abundance;” 23: 388–90).

The rhetorical and poetic role of the Genius character in the *Concorde* most retains our attention. It can be argued that Jean Lemaire emulates the *Rose*’s staging of Genius as a poetic reproducer who represents the authorial *persona* in times of menacing political and belligerent hostility. At the same time, Jean Lemaire strengthens the link between Genius and the vernacular’s fertilization. Adding to its sheer weight in the text, Genius’s speech glorifying the powers of reproduction is also virtually the only instance where a character speaks in direct discourse.<sup>34</sup> His character’s voice is thus the only other voice to address directly the reader aside from the author’s narrative voice. Emulating Jean de Meun’s

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Language and Poetry,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 3 (1980): 29–39.

<sup>32</sup> I use Jean Frappier’s edition of *La Concorde des deux langages*. Textes littéraires français (Paris: Droz, 1947) and indicate page and verse (vv.) or line numbers (ll.) between brackets. Emphasis added. The English translation is mine.

<sup>33</sup> See the *Introduction* to Frappier’s edition, xxiv–xxv.

<sup>34</sup> Another short passage in direct discourse occurs in the Minerva Temple when the author converses with the allegorical character “Labeur historien”, but most of this dialogue is in indirect discourse.

presentation of Genius, Jean Lemaire also marks the shift in the authorial first-person narrative voice from author to Genius when the latter “s’apresta pour ung peu sermonner” (“prepared himself to sermonize a little”): *Chascun se teust, tous pour ouïr s’acoustrent*. Si print son theume: «*Etatis breve ver*» (All were silent, all made themselves ready to listen. Thus he started his speech: «*Life’s short springtime*»,” 22: 360; 364–65). Just as Love’s barons eagerly gather around Genius to hear his speech in the *Rose*, just so Jean Lemaire’s fictional audience, including the first-person voice of the author, keeps quiet in order to allow the voice of the “je”-Genius to resound. It is stressed more than once that he combines a divine status (“*je, qui suis vostre chief souverain*” [“I, who am your supreme ruler;” 28: 497]; “*Je, Genius, grant primat premerain*” [“I, Genius, great sovereign Primate;” 28: 499]; “*Je suis celuy qui [read: cui] Dieu a fait reluire*” [“I am the one whom God made shine;” 29: 526]) with rhetorical skills: “*Genius suis, vous suyvant en tous lieux / Pour vous semondre et vous persuader*” (“Genius I am, following you everywhere to preach to you and to persuade you;” 29: 530–31). His declamatory power becomes even more apparent in the effects of his rhetorically successful *move* after the speech:

Aux parolles de l’archiprebstre Genius, plusieurs personnaiges de jeunesse gallicane et françoise, esmeuz et entalentéz d’aller à l’offrande, sans attendre la fin du sermon, comme plains de fureur amoureuse, contraignirent ledict predicateur de syncoper sa collation. (34, ll. 110–14)

[At the words of the archpriest Genius, several youths of Gallican and French origin, stirred and longing to go to Communion, without waiting for the sermon to end, as they were filled with amorous fervor, forced the preacher to cut short his homily.]

In this passage Genius’s speech particularly enthuses the French (“jeunesse gallicane et françoise”) rather than the Italian youth. Venus’s Temple is indeed situated in Lyon,<sup>35</sup> but this blunt national discrimination strikes us nevertheless as odd, since before it was said that “tant de françois que toscan et latin / L’air y resonance” (“the air resounds with French as well as Tuscan and Latin;” 18: 268–69). Yet the singling out of the French and their language can be traced back to passages within Genius’s speech itself:

Telz estes vous, o peuple reluisant,  
 Peuple de Gaule aussi blanc comme let,  
 Gent tant courtoise, et tant propre et duisant; (...)  
 François faictiz, francz, fortz, fermes au fait,  
 Fins, frecz, de fer, feroces sans frayeur,  
 Telz sont voz noms concordans à l’effect. (31: 580–85)

<sup>35</sup> Introduction to Frappier’s edition, xxx–xxxi.

[Such are you, o bright people / People of Gaul white as milk, / Folk so courtly and affable, so proper and handsome; / Well-formed French, frank, well-bodied, and steady in course, / Fine and fresh, made of steel and fearlessly ferocious, / Those are the names that befit you well.]

The alliteration on the voiceless labial fricative [f] in this passage ("François faictiz, francz, fortz,") becomes an exuberant phonetic celebration of French(ness), an efficient two-verse sonic artifact that in its alternation between the sound [fr] evoking 'François' and 'France', and the sound [fer] calling to mind 'fertilité', stylistically mimics linguistic reproduction. Through this subtle phonetic fertilization of French, Genius mimes the author figure as a linguistic fertilizer of the French vernacular.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, it should be noted that Genius as Nature's priest functions generally as the keeper of the "Book of Nature" in which he inscribes the totality of the natural universe (in the *Rose*: "recordait / les figures representables / de toutes choses corrumptables / qu'il ot *escrites en son livre*, / si con Nature les li livre" [16250–54; "recited . . . the representatives shapes of all corruptible things that he had written in his book, just as Nature had given them to him;" 275]). In the *Concorde*'s context of linguistic fertilization of the vernacular, this universal dimension acquires additional meaning.<sup>37</sup> The moment when the audience keeps quiet in preparation of Genius's speech ("Chascun se teust" ["All were silent;" 22: 364]), creates more than a rhetorical staging. It also stresses the contrast between Genius's words and the more than one hundred preceding verses abundantly describing Venus's temple (starting at "Ung temple y a, plus beau ne vit oncq nulz" ["A temple there is, a more beautiful one no one ever saw;" 12: 133]) and the exuberant musical and vocal universe of singing angels, reciting poets, and playing musicians resonating throughout both Venus's temple and the larger cosmos ("Les neuf beaux cieulx que Dieu tourne et tempere / Rendent tel bruit en leurs spheres diffuses / Que le son vient jusqu'en nostre hemisphere" ["The nine beautiful heavens that God turns and governs / Resonate so much in their large spheres / That the sound reaches our hemisphere;" 18: 262–264]). In other words, Genius's discourse textually 'silences' and comes to replace the totality of this natural and linguistic universe. Jean Lemaire uses this contrast to bestow a sense of universality on the French vernacular: while French, Italian, and Latin pervaded

<sup>36</sup> See also François Rigolot who claims that the *Concorde* is ultimately a subtle allegorical apology of the French rather than the Italian language ("Jean Lemaire de Belges: concorde ou discorde des deux langages?" *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3, 2 [1973]: 165–75, here 174). Cynthia Brown reaches a similar conclusion of "French linguistic superiority" ("Jean Lemaire's *La Concorde*," 35).

<sup>37</sup> See also Robert Griffin, "Cosmic Metaphor in *La Concorde des deux langages*," *Pre-Pléiade Poetry*, ed. Jerry Nash. French Forum Monographs, 57 (Lexington, KY: French Forum Publishers, 1985), 15–30.

the temple before the speech (18: 268), the rhetorically and phonetically fertilizing French of Genius's speech now fills both temple and universe.

While the *Concorde* stages no real or allegorical warfare, both Genius's exhortations to procreate physically and his fertile, universe-pervading French vernacular should be read in the context of the need to defend and fortify the French kingdom in the face of the hostile pugnacious threats alluded to in the conclusion of his speech. Against this background, we should see Jean Lemaire's blatant nationalistic praise of the "Peuple de Gaul" ("People of Gallia;" 31: 581) as support of the Gallican politics of King Louis XII who opposed the belligerent anti-French politics of Pope Jules II and his 'holy league' with the Venetians.<sup>38</sup> More striking than this eulogy, which arguably only reveals a *rhétoriqueur's* obligation to support his employer's political aspirations, is Genius's calling to mind of a more serious and larger hostile menace, namely the Turks:

Vos clers penons en Asië se lievent,  
 Les Turcz ont peur de vostre bruit et fame,  
 Et voz fiertéz redoubtent et eschievent.  
 Grece a fiance en l'ardent auriflame  
 Qui d'iceulx Turcz les yeulx esblouÿra;  
 C'est tout l'espoir qu'elle attend et reclame  
 Vostre haulteur de ce l'esjouÿra  
 Dedens brief temps, car j'en voy les apprestz,  
 Dont ung chacun votre nom benira. (32: 598–606)

[Your vivid pennants are lifted in Asia, / The Turks are frightened by your name and fame, / And fear and recoil from your impetuosity. // Greece trusts the ardent banner / That will blind those Turkish eyes; / That's the hope she harbors and claims. // Your greatness will make her rejoice / In short time, for I already see the preparations / For which each and everyone will bless your name.]

Frappier reminds us of the efforts to mount another crusade against the Turks in the years 1508–1510 to which these verses allude, and of the importance of this theme in the period's literature. Whether Jean Lemaire was "one of the most zealous and honest propagandists" remains doubtful,<sup>39</sup> but that the reference to the Turkish peril in Genius's speech is crucial, since it relocates his discourse in a context of warfare, i.e., the precarious situation of sixteenth-century France under constant menace of enemy forces, those of the Infidels in particular.<sup>40</sup> Genius's conclusion accordingly reformulates his 'increase and multiply'

<sup>38</sup> Introduction to Frappier's edition, xlix.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem* and 77, footnote 149.

<sup>40</sup> See also Timothy Hampton, *Literature and Nation in the Sixteenth Century. Inventing Renaissance France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 39: "the Ottoman Empire . . . was a source of political panic and moral confusion for Christian intellectuals during the sixteenth century."

addressed to the youth of the temple in the spirit of the Deuteronomy law forcing future warriors to assure physical procreation of the species:

Refocillez voz membres et voz vaines;  
 Impossible est que tousjours arc puist tendre,  
 Car ses forces en seroient trop vaines.  
*Entredeux fault à volupté entendre*  
*Et y vaquer à l'exemple de Mars,*  
 Qui s'accointoi de Venus blanche et tendre (32–33: 610–15)

[Warm up your limbs and blood; / It is impossible to always bent the bow, / Since its force would eventually weaken too much. / In the meantime it is better to attend to voluptuousness / And cultivate it, in imitation of Mars, when he had carnal intercourse with Venus white and tender]

Genius's injunction to the French warriors to rest and indulge in the pleasures of Venus before engaging in battle parallels his rhetorical and poetic fertilization of the universe-filling French vernacular as counterpart to physical procreation of the species in times of warfare. Jean Lemaire thus both 'politicizes' and 'historicizes' Jean de Meun's staging of belligerent situations as the thriving ground for biological and linguistic begetting within a contemporary political context of menacing destructive forces against which the French kingdom and language have to affirm themselves.

\* \* \*

Jean de Meun's and Jean Lemaire de Belges's poetic fertilizations as parallels to the procreation of the species in a situation of warfare shed light on Rabelais's *Prologue* to the *Tiers Livre* (1546). In it, Rabelais compares himself to the Greek philosopher Diogenes, who, after contemplating the feverish activities of his fellow Corinthians to fortify their city against the imminent attack of the Macedonian King Philip, decides to engage in a futile rolling of the barrel that serves as his house in order not to seem unoccupied. This continuous rolling is established as the symbol of Rabelaisian writing when the author invites the reader to come drink from his "tonneau Diogenic" ("Diogenic barrell").<sup>41</sup> The *Prologue*, stylistically one of the most dazzling literary recastings of the Biblical injunction *increase and multiply* in the early modern period, mimetically prefigures the *Tiers Livre's* joyous celebration of human procreation through marriage, and thus emblemizes Rabelais's

<sup>41</sup> All quotes are from Michael Screech's edition of the *Tiers Livre*. Textes littéraires français, 102 (Geneva: Droz, 1964). For the English translation I use Donald Frame, *The Complete Works of François Rabelais* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). Page and, if necessary, line numbers (ll.) are indicated between brackets in the text. Emphasis added.

influence on the humanist reform of the marital institution, in which the author sought to revamp marriage as a place of Christian piety and affinity between the partners.<sup>42</sup>

In the *Prologue*, in a manner reminiscent of Jean's allegorical battle description, Rabelais brings together a shifting authorial perspective with linguistic procreation in a context of war. Recalling Jean's enforcement of authorial perspective when the Lover withdraws in contemplation at the onset of battle, Rabelais casts aside the obscure pseudonym Alcofribas Nasier, "Abstractor of Quintessence," the narrative *persona* he had adopted for the *Prologues* of *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua* and which justified his own participation in the fiction, to introduce himself as Master François Rabelais, "Doctor of Medicine." This direct address of the author's voice from the outset of the 'marital book' empowers the author as a poetic procreator on a par with biological fecundity.

Rabelais uses this voice at once to call up the Diogenes figure, who will become, as I argue, his textual *alter ego* in poetic and rhetorical procreation in the *Prologue*: "Bonnes gens, Beuveurs tresillustres, et vous Goutteux tresprecieux, veistez vous oncques Diogenes, le philosophe cynic?" (7; "Good folk, most illustrious toppers, and you, most precious poxies, did you ever see Diogenes, the Cynic philosopher?;" 253). Aside from the philosophical connotations of Diogenes as a revealer of wisdom through vision, irony, and cynicism,<sup>43</sup> his burlesque barrel-rolling bridges the distance between the narrative action and the craft of the writer in the description of the siege of Corinth.<sup>44</sup> Although seemingly an unbridled verbal cascade, the entire passage is in fact controlled by a rigid structure: first the description of the Corinthian defense works (9–11, ll. 45–89), then Diogenes's activities (11–12, ll. 90–124), and finally the appearance of the author (12, l. 125).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See e.g. Screech, *The Rabelaisian Marriage*. The *Prologue* has been interpreted in many other ways. See, for instance: Florence Weinberg, "«A mon tonneau je retourne»: Rabelais's *Prologue* to the *Tiers Livre*," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23, 3 (1992): 548–63; and Floyd Gray, "Structure and Meaning in the *Prologue* to the *Tiers Livre*," *L'Esprit Créateur* 3 (1963): 57–62. See also François Rigolot, *Les Langages de Rabelais*. Titre courant 6 (Geneva: Droz, 1996), 99–102; Edwin Duval, *The Design of Rabelais's Tiers Livre de Pantagruel*. Études Rabelaisiennes, 34; Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, 316 (Geneva: Droz, 1997), 16–21; and Diane Desrosiers-Bonin, *Rabelais et l'humanisme civil*. Études Rabelaisiennes, 27; Travaux d'humanisme et Renaissance, 263 (Geneva: Droz, 1992), 213–19.

<sup>43</sup> Weinberg, "«A mon tonneau je retourne»," 551 and Antónia Szabari, "Rabelais *Parrhesiastes*: The Rhetoric of Insult and Rabelais's Cynical Mask," *Modern Language Notes* 120, Supplement (2005): 84–123.

<sup>44</sup> Parts of this reading are recast from my earlier discussion in French of Rabelais's subtext of marital fecundity in the *Prologue* (*Le Mariage et l'«amitié courtoise» dans le dialogue et le récit bref de la Renaissance*. Biblioteca dell' "Archivum Romanicum." Serie I, Storia, letteratura, paleografia, 306 [Florence: Olschki, 2003], 187–91). Since I analyze this passage here from a different perspective, I have integrated rather than referenced these parts in order to facilitate my argumentation.

<sup>45</sup> For the English translation, see 253–60.

Each of these parts is subsequently divided into ramifying smaller units, so that the writing 'gives birth' to a genealogical structure of multiplying language.

The defense works of the besieged Corinthians are divided in two groups of descriptions with the same stylistic structure *some . . . others*: first "*Les uns des champs es forteresses*" ("Some . . . from the fields and into the fortresses") and "*Les autres remparoiient murailles*" ("Others were repairing walls"), then "*Les uns polissoient corselets*" ("Some were polishing corslets") and "*Les autres apprestoient*" ("Others were readying"), each group being symmetrically divided by two stylistically similar phrases: "*Chascun estoit au guet, chascun portoit la hotte*" ("Every man was on the watch, every man was carrying his basket") and "*Chascun eserceoit son penard: chascun desrouilloit son bracquemard*" ("Everyone was exercising his poniard; everyone was scouring the rust of his hanger"). Within the unities introduced by the construction *some . . . others* we find numerous verbal accelerations. For instance, whereas the first group starts with a relatively short phrase consisting of one verb and a series of nouns: "*Les uns des champs es forteresses retiroient meubles, bestails, grains, vins, fruitcz, victuailles et munitions necessaires*" ("Some were bringing back from the fields and into the fortresses movables, cattle, grains, wines, fruits, necessary victuals, and munitions"), in the second part not only the number of verbs increases, but the rhythm speeds up as well since every verb is now linked to a noun, qualitatively increasing the style: "*Les autres remparoiient murailles, dressoient bastions, esquarroiient ravelins, cavoient fossez, . . . etc.*" ("Others were repairing walls, setting up bastions, squaring off ravelins, digging ditches"). The second sequence of *some . . . others* at first continues this rhythm: "*Les uns polissoient corselets, vernissoient alecretz, nettoioient bardes*" ("Some were polishing corslets, varnishing cuirasses, cleaning housings") but accelerates on the third verb: "*nettoioient bardes, chanfrains, aubergeons, briguandines, salades, etc.*" ("cleaning housings, frontstalls, habergeons, brigandines, helmets"). Although it repeats the earlier structure of one verb followed by a list of nouns, the rhythm here is now less dry as it sprang from the preceding sequence 'verb plus noun.' The second half of this unit enriches this structure by a verbal multiplication, creating three different sequences of a verb followed by a series of nouns: "*Les autres apprestoient arcs, fondes, [etc., followed by twelve nouns]*" ("Others were readying bows, slings"); "*Esguisoient vouges, picques, rancons, [etc., followed by eighteen nouns]*" ("sharpening boar spears, pikes, hooks"), and "*Affiloient cimenterres, brands d'assier, [etc., followed by fifteen nouns]*" ("whetting scimitars, cutlasses"). Finally, of the two symmetric dividing phrases, the second not only increases in length, but also adds a sexual connotation, first on the level of male sexuality ("*Chascun exercoit son penard: chascun desrouilloit son bracquemard*" ["Everyone was exercising his poniard; everyone was scouring the rust of his hanger"]), then on that of female sexuality ("*Femme n'estoit, tant preude ou vieille feust, qui ne feist fourbir son harnoy*:"



comme vous sçavez que les antiques Corinthiennes estoient au *combat* courageuses" ["No woman was there, however old and prudish, who did not get her harness furbished; for, as you know, the old-time Corinthian women were courageous in combat"]). Aside from the striking female participation in a typically male topos of immortality on the battlefield, the "Corinthiennes," whose sexual vigor is exemplified in the hidden sexual meaning of the word "combat" as carnal intercourse, contribute to the notion of necessary physical reproduction in times of warfare.

Linguistic procreation continues when the focus shifts to Diogenes. His initial and government-imposed status as a non-active civilian with respect to the war preparations is remarkable and turns him into a sideline observer like the *Rose's* Lover:

Diogenes, les voyant en telle ferveur mesnaige remuer, et n'estant par les magistratz employé à chose aulcune faire, contempla par quelques jours leur contenance sans mot dire: (11)

[Diogenes, seeing them turning everything upside down with such fervor, and not being employed by the magistrates to do anything, for a few days contemplated their behavior without saying anything; 255]

His silence only heightens the suspense for what is to come, namely a frenzied linguistic barrel-rolling making up for his impotence with respect to any physical involvement in the siege. The rhythm first imitates the previous verb + noun sequences ("*ceignit* son palle en escharpe, *recoursa* ses manches, etc.") ["he flung his cloak around him like a scarf, trussed up his robe"]), to quickly accelerate in a cascade of verbs: "*le* tournoit, viroit, brouilloit, barbouilloit, hersoit, versoit, renversoit, nattoit, grattoit, flattoit, etc." ("veered it [i.e., the barrel], twisted it, scrambled it, garbled it, churned it, turned it, overturned it, rustled it, hustled it, muscled it"). More than a quantitative verbal reproduction (the passage contains by far the longest sequence of verbs in the *Prologue*), we see an intensification of the discourse by a multiplication not of nouns referring to static objects, but of verbs referring to actions. Moreover, less dominated by a precise denotative relationship to the signified than the nouns of the Corinthians, which referred to specific tools of warfare, the Diogenic verbs are not only linguistically autonomous, but they also stage Diogenes as the intermediate figure bridging the world of the text (active barrel-rolling in the plot) and the linguistic realm of the author ('pure' verbs).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For the relationship between *mots* and *choses* in Rabelais, see François Rigolot's seminal "Cratylisme et Pantagruélisme: Rabelais et le statut du signe," *Études Rabelaisiennes* 13 (1976): 115–32.

The reader is thus prepared for the *Je*-author's powerful appearance on the stage, which seems naturally 'generated' by the preceding two exercises in linguistic begetting:

*Je pareillement, quoy que soys hors d'effroy, ne suis toutesfoys hors d'esmoy, de moy voyant n'estre faict aulcun pris digne d'œuvre, et consyderant par tout ce tresnoble royaume [de France] deça, dela les mons, un chascun aujourd'huy soy instantement exercer et travailler. (12)*

[I likewise, although free from fear, am nonetheless not free from care, seeing that I am held to be of no account worth putting to work, and considering that throughout this whole most noble kingdom of France, both on this side of the mountains and beyond them, today each and every man is earnestly exerting himself and working; 256]

Rabelais narrows the focus on his own literary *persona* as the author of all this linguistic *engendrement* by going from the anonymous Corinthians (*some... others*), via the third person of his alias Diogenes, to a strongly emphasized "Je." Like Diogenes in the defense of Corinth, Rabelais is officially rendered non-active in the warfare threatening France and is left no other choice than futile but fertile linguistic reproducing. In the following passage, as in the preceding one, lamentations on his impotent civil status alternate with exuberant yet gratuitous outpourings of writing in which we recognize earlier stylistic patters of multiplication that connote the mimetic potency of his language:

Par doncques n'estre adscript et en ranc mis des nostres en partie offensive, qui me ont estimé trop *imbecille et impotent*, de l'autre qui est defensive n'estre employé aulcunement, feust ce *portant hotte, cachant crotte, ployant rotte ou cassant motte*, tout m'estoit indifférent: ay imputé à honte plus que mediocre *estre veu spectateur ocieux* de tant vaillans, disers et chevalereux personnages, qui en veue et spectacle de toute Europe jouent ceste insigne fable et Tragicque comedie, ne me esvertuer de moy mesmes et non y consommer *ce rien, mon tout, qui me restoit*. . . . Prins ce choys et election, *ay pensé ne faire exercice inutile et importun, si je remuois mon tonneau Diogenic*. (13-14)

[So for not being enrolled and placed in the ranks of our men in the offensive part, since they have judged me to be too feeble and impotent, and in the other, which is defensive, not being employed at all, even if it were in carrying hods, burying sewage, binding, kindling, or breaking up clods, it didn't matter to me, I thought it a more than moderate shame to be seen an idle spectator of so many valiant, eloquent, and knightly personages, who in the sight and spectacle of all Europe are playing this notable fable and tragic comedy, not to put out my utmost effort myself, and not to accomplish by it that little, my all, that I had left. . . . This choice and option taken I thought I would perform no useless and importunate exercise if I agitated my Diogenic barrel; 257]

The inexhaustible barrel assures fecundity in language allowing both Diogenes and Rabelais to remedy their physical impotence and become the poetic counterparts of the Judaic first-year married men exempted from war under the

Deuteronomy law of which Rabelais was so fond. Their linguistic fertility differs markedly from the rhetorical notion of *copia* (copiousness) according to which the orator's discourse should show an abundant choice of locutions appropriate for the rhetorical situation and for the orator's specific intentions: *fecunditas* or *cornucopia* signifies abundance as a result of rhetorical 'fertilization' in the writer's mind.<sup>47</sup> Rabelais's *Prologue*, however, more than featuring abundance as a rhetorical tool, showcases the reproductive faculty itself, since the Diogenic language mimes the process of biological procreation. Diogenes and the author generate language according to an augmentative structure of reproductive multiplication, a true linguistic *crescite et multiplicamini*.

The *persona* of the author as linguistic reproducer helping the war effort is further reinforced when the barrel is presented as an infinite source of wine, which, in the plot, refreshes the "guerroyans" ("combatants") and, metaphorically, denotes his poetic and rhetorical skills:

Et me aurent, puyz que compaignon ne peuz estre, pour *Architriclin* loyal, *refraischissant* à mon petit povoir leur retour des alarmes, et *laudateur*, je diz infatiguable, de leurs prouesses et glorieux faicts d'armes. (16)

[And since comrade [i.e., in arms] I may not be, they shall have me as their loyal steward of the feast, within my small power offering refreshment for their return from alarm, and tireless, I say, in praise of their exploits and glorious feats of arms; 258]

The reference to the "Architriclin," the organizer of the wedding banquet and the distributor of wine at the Biblical wedding at Cana (John 2: 8–9<sup>48</sup>) does more than inscribing the *Prologue* in the traditions of 'wine-drinking-poets' and the search for truth-in-the-bottle<sup>49</sup>: it underpins the crucial parallel between marital (i.e., biological) fecundity and the poetic fecundity assured by the author. The miracle at the Cana wedding is further exploited by Rabelais in the *Prologue*:

Et paour ne ayez que le vin faille, comme feist *es nopces de Cana en Galilée*. Autant que vous en tireray par la dille, autant en entonneray par le bondon. Ainsi demeurera le tonneau inexpuisable. *Il a source vive et vene perpetuelle*. (19)

<sup>47</sup> "The phrase *copia dicendi*, or even *copia* alone, is a ubiquitous synonym for eloquence. Coupled with other words from the same semantic domain (*abundantia*, *ubertas*, *opes*, *varietas*), it suggests a rich, many-faceted discourse springing from a fertile mind and powerfully affecting its recipient" (Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1979], 5).

<sup>48</sup> "Et dicit eis Iesus: Haurite nunc, et ferte architriclino. Et tulerunt. Ut autem gustavit architriclinus aquam vinum factam . . ." (*Biblia Sacra*).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Michel Jeanneret, *Des Mets et des mots: Banquets et propos de table à la Renaissance* (Paris: Corti, 1987), 120–23.

[And have no fear that the wine will run out, as it did at the wedding in Cana in Galilee. As much as I draw from the spigot, I'll funnel in through the bung. Thus will the barrel remain inexhaustible. It has a living spring and a perpetual vein; 259]

Rather than quantitative abundance, Christ's miracle is a qualitative increase, turning water into wine. It underscores the processes of both physical and linguistic begetting not as purely repetitive increases and gratuitous abundance, but as fertile transformations affecting the very nature of elements: "Il a source *vive*" ("It has a living spring").

Rabelais's staging of Diogenes in this role can be fruitfully compared to that of Genius as authorial *alter ego* and linguistic reproducer in times of warfare in the works of Jean de Meun and Jean Lemaire de Belges.<sup>50</sup> Their Geniuses and Rabelais's Diogenes denote a crucial intersection between, on the one hand, the dynamics of war, siege, and reproduction of the species, and, on the other, those of poetic and rhetorical procreation of language in the vernacular. Moreover, in their detached and semi-godlike status they mimetically substantiate the author's *persona* in the world of the narrative action as a poetic and rhetoric replenisher of a divine nature.

The etymological resemblance in the names Genius and Diogenes draws further attention to this connection. The word-roots in *gen* of their names recall both etymologically and phonetically their status as spiritual entities associated to regenerative forces: both names go back to the Indo-European root *gen-*, "to give birth, beget", with its many derivatives referring to procreation and family.<sup>51</sup> Both names evoke a god-like status, Diogenes signifying the one "begotten by God,"<sup>52</sup> whereas the roots of the Genius figure lay from antiquity with the generative spirit and the divine forces presiding over matters related to offspring.<sup>53</sup> Thus the names Genius and Diogenes combine the notions of generative and spiritual procreation (the latter defined as related to products of the soul, such as poetry, rather than related to the body) and underline the role of the author in poetic begetting.

Paradoxically, Rabelais has temporarily 're-allegorized' the situation of pugnacious threat: whereas Jean Lemaire de Belges transposes an allegorical figure from the *Rose's psychomachia* to a real-life political strife, Rabelais initially allegorizes current politics by relocating the situation in historical fiction (i.e., the siege of Corinth). But the outcome is the same, namely a fertile reproduction of the

<sup>50</sup> For Rabelais's use of Diogenes and the notion of authorship from the perspective of the cynical tradition, which we have left outside the scope of our analysis, see Szabari, "Rabelais *Parrhesiastes*," 118–23.

<sup>51</sup> See the entry "gen-," *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, ed. Calvert Watkins (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), s.v.

<sup>52</sup> See Weinberg, "«A mon tonneau je retourne»," 551.

<sup>53</sup> See Jane Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), 7.

French vernacular in a context of belligerent menace. Shortly after, Rabelais then too transposes this context to his own times when he shifts the focus from fertile Diogenic barrel-rolling to his own authorship and from the siege of Corinth to that of France, which he contemplates:

*[C]onsyderant par tout ce tresnoble royaume de France, deça, dela les mons, un chascun aujourd’huy soy instantanement exercer et travailler: part à la fortification de sa patrie et la defendre, part au repoulement des ennemis et les offendre: le tout en police tant belle, en ordonnance si mirifique et à profit tant évident pour l’advenir (Car désormais sera France superbement bournée, seront François en repous asceurez), que peu de chose me retient que je n’entre en l’opinion du bon Heraclitus, affermant guerre estre de tous biens pere (12)*

[considering that throughout this whole most noble kingdom of France, both on this side of the mountains and beyond them, today each and every man is earnestly exerting himself and working, partly on the fortification of his fatherland and defending it, partly on repelling the enemy and harming them, all this in such fair polity, such wonderful ordering, and to such evident advantage for the future, (for henceforth shall France be superbly bordered, shall the French be secured in repose) that little restrains me from coming to the opinion of the good Heraclitus, that war was the father of all good things; 256]

In the above passage, war is ‘good’ since it has a constructive role in the struggle between destructive and life-giving forces and it will thus help give birth to the future vernacular nation of which the author posits himself as the linguistic fertilizer. In this light, the *Prologue* can be read as ‘birth-giving’ at two levels: first, the mimetically reproductive language fathered by Diogenes during the siege of Corinth fertilizes the French vernacular; and second, physical and linguistic fertility and procreation are conflated in the birth of a vernacular nation affirming itself antagonistically by prevailing over outside destructive forces. While in the *Prologue* Rabelais clearly has the French kingdom in mind, the idea of a vernacular nation being born is elaborated in a more universal (and more comic) vein in the first Chapter “Comment Pantagruel transporta une colonie de Utopiens en Dipsodie” (“How Pantagruel transported a colony of Utopians into Dipsody”). With its burlesque and cornucopian description of the Dipsodians’ fertility, this chapter seems to be ‘born’ from the *Prologue* and posits both physical and literary fertility at the cradle of the entire *Tiers Livre*’s narrative<sup>54</sup>:

Pantagruel avoir entierement conquesté le pays de Dipsodie, en icelluy transporta une colonie de Utopiens en nombre de 9876543210 hommes, sans les femmes et petitiz enfans . . . pour ledict pays *refraichir, peupler et orner*. . . ja besoing n’est d’aventage vous l’exposer, que les Utopiens avoient les genitoires tant feconds, et les Utopienes portoient matrices tant amples, gloutes, tenaces, et cellulées par bonne architecture,

<sup>54</sup> For the Dipsodie episode, see also Duval, *The Design of Rabelais’s Tiers Livre*, 29–37.

que, au bout de chascun neufvieme moys, sept enfans pour le moins, que masles que femelles, naissoient par chascun mariage, à l'imitation du peuple Judaïc en Ægypte, si de Lyra ne delyre. (23)

[Pantagruel, having utterly conquered the country of Dipsodie, transported into it a colony of Utopians in the number of 9876543210 men (not counting the women and little children), . . . , so as to refresh, populate and adorn the said country, . . . there is no more need to inform you of it further, that the Utopian men had genitals so fertile, and the Utopian women wombs so ample, gluttonous, tenacious, and architecturally well cellulated, that every month seven children at the very least, both males and females, were born of each marriage, in imitation of Judaic people in Egypt (if De Lyra is not delirious); 261]

The phrase “à l'imitation du peuple Judaïc” not only recalls the legendary fecundity of the Judaic women in Egypt,<sup>55</sup> but also reminds us of the wartime exemption for first-year Judaic men that allowed the people to guarantee fertility under threat of destruction. The burlesque description of the Dipsodian fertile population thus allegorically parallels the fertilization of French language in the *Prologue* with the creation of a vernacular nation.

In this context, the link between Rabelais's *Tiers Livre* and Jean Lemaire de Belges's *Concorde* is remarkable, since in the latter text Genius as linguistic reproducer is endowed with an emphasized nationalistic leadership: he is “premier primat haultain / De toute Gaule” [“the first highest Primate / of entire Gaul”] (15: 199–200), a designation which Genius further underlines in his speech: “Je, Genius, grant primat premerain / De toute Gaule” (28: 499–500). Jean Lemaire not only transfers Genius's divine and priest-like status in the *Rose* to the Archbishop of Lyon, ecclesiastical ruler of the *Gaule lyonnaise* (one of the four former provinces to constitute roman *Gallia*<sup>56</sup>), but, as it is clear that the “people of Gaul” metonymically designate the French, also makes Genius a worldly leader as well as a spiritual divinity. More than Jean de Meun, Jean Lemaire bestows on Genius his ancient nature of the generative founding father of an empire.<sup>57</sup> The dense mixture of pagan and Christian aspects of the Genius figure as a spiritual and worldly leader thus contributes to Genius's role as founding father of the vernacular nation of France in Jean Lemaire's text. This image has a striking continuity in Rabelais's use of the Diogenes figure: given his particular role as a linguistic reproducer representing the authorial *persona*, this Rabelaisian Genius strengthens the notion of a fertilization of a vernacular nation that is further allegorized in the Dipsodian episode.

<sup>55</sup> See Jean Céard's reference to Plinius's *Natural History* (VII, 3) in his annotation of the *Tiers Livre*. Bibliothèque Classique (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1995), 34, note 7.

<sup>56</sup> Rigolot, “Jean Lemaire de Belges: concorde ou discorde,” 167.

<sup>57</sup> See Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure*, 15.

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These readings of Jean de Meun's *Rose*, Jean Lemaire de Belges's *Concorde*, and Rabelais's *Tiers Livre* have sought to bring to the fore the thematic intersection of: a) physical procreation of the species in a time of warfare and belligerent threats; b) poetic and rhetorical regeneration by the author figure as a form of linguistic replenishment that mimes physical begetting; and c) the poetic fertilization and enrichment of the French language. The continuity of this particular literary junction from the Middle Ages to the early Renaissance as evinced by the legacy of the *Roman de la Rose* and Jean de Meun's staging of the author figure allows us to understand the authorial role in poetic and linguistic replenishment of the French vernacular as a sustained preoccupation of poets and prose writers long before Joachim Du Bellay's famous *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse*. Jean de Meun's, Jean Lemaire de Belges's, and Rabelais's similar stagings of this intersection help us to contextualize and to nuance our critical perspective of Du Bellay's 'illustration' of the French language by means of imitation of classical authors. It allows us to consider the medieval and early modern concern with poetic and linguistic enrichment of the vernacular as part of a French poetic tradition that bridges Middle Ages and Renaissance.

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## Deadly Sex and Sexy Death in Early Modern French Literature

"Sexuality is irrepressible," as Albrecht Classen points out in the introduction to this volume; death, as we all know, is unavoidable. It is inevitable, then, that sex and death would meet, and although Freud construed them as opposing passions, we find that sex is inextricably linked with death in medieval and early modern literature. Georges Bataille reminds us that "Populairement, l'orgasme a le nom de 'petite mort'" ("The orgasm is popularly termed 'the little death'").<sup>1</sup> According to Bataille, the experience of amorous passion is virtually indistinguishable from the sensation of death:

Nul ne saurait nier qu'un élément essentiel de l'excitation est le sentiment de perdre pied, de chavirer. L'amour n'est pas ou il est en nous, *comme la mort*, un mouvement de perte rapide, glissant vite à la tragédie, et ne s'arrêtant que dans la mort. Tant il est vrai qu'entre la mort, et la «petite mort», ou le chavirement, qui enivrent, la distance est insensible.

[No one could deny that one essential element of excitement is the feeling of being swept off one's feet, of falling headlong. If love exists at all it is, like death, a swift movement of loss within us, quickly slipping into tragedy and stopping only with death. For the truth is that between death and the reeling, heady motion of the little death the distance is hardly noticeable.]<sup>2</sup>

The link between sex and death in early modern French literature is markedly diverse. At times the pursued love object dies, at others it is the impassioned subject who perishes. As Bataille explains, "La possession de l'être aimé ne signifie pas la mort, au contraire, mais la mort est engagée dans sa recherche. Si l'amant ne peut posséder l'être aimé, il pense parfois à le tuer: souvent il aimerait mieux

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1957), 264. English translations are from Georges Bataille, *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer, 1962); here 239.

<sup>2</sup> Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, 264–65 (*Death and Sensuality*, 239).



le tuer que le perdre. Il désire en d'autres cas sa propre mort" ("Possession of the beloved object does not imply death, but the idea of death is linked with the urge to possess. If the lover cannot possess the beloved he will sometimes think of killing her; often he would rather kill her than lose her. Or else he may wish to die himself").<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps surprising that women, who reportedly kill both by withholding sex and by demanding it excessively, are more often deadly in these texts, men are more often dead. Widows, who occupy their particular role in society as a result of their husbands' death, cannot escape their association with death in literature. Likewise, because they are sexually initiated, they arouse suspicions about their sexual conduct and cynicism about their chastity. Wives, too, are sometimes portrayed as mortally libidinous, and even maidens could kill, though they were lethal not because of their excessive demands for sex, but instead because they withheld it. Early modern poets, perhaps most notably Pierre de Ronsard, spent their careers lamenting that they would perish of unrequited love.<sup>4</sup>

But the customary formula woman=sex=sin=death might well be amended, for it seems that often sex leads to death which in turn leads to immortality. A woman who dies while attempting to protect her chastity is described as a martyr; a man who dies for lack of love (which is to say "lack of sex") is depicted the same way. Early modern poets, languishing in unrequited passion, immortalized their love and their beloved in verse.

While topics on sex or death in their own right have inspired many gripping tales, fascination with sex tainted by death, and death linked with sex, make for particularly compelling storytelling. David M. Turner asserts, for example, that "Death ushered in under the veil of affection gave narratives of spouse-murder their horrific force."<sup>5</sup> Albrecht Classen remarks that "Both medieval and modern literary and artistic entertainment reflect the everlasting relevance of these passions and emotions [love, violence, hatred, and aggression], as they are admired and detested, deliberately espoused and rejected, feared and idealized."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, 27 (*Death and Sensuality*, 20).

<sup>4</sup> Ellen M. Anderson reminds us that "The result of the beloved's withdrawal is a metaphoric death, a commonplace of Renaissance Neoplatonism after Ficino." Ellen M. Anderson, "The Lover into the Beloved Transformed: Neoplatonic Love as a Means for Self-Transformation in Cervantes' *El rufián dichoso*," *Love and Death in the Renaissance*, ed. Kenneth R. Bartlett, Konrad Eisenbichler, and Janice Liedl (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1991), 1–16; here 3.

<sup>5</sup> David M. Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England, 1660–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 123. Since storytelling began, it seems, sex and death have been connected. Sidnie Ann White, "In the Steps of Jael and Deborah: Judith as Heroine," *No One Spoke Ill of Her: Essays on Judith*, ed. James C. VanderKam. Early Judaism and Its Literature, 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 5–16; here 9, points out that "A tie between sex and death is well-known in ancient literature, including the Biblical literature."

<sup>6</sup> Albrecht Classen, "Introduction: Violence in the Shadows of the Court," *Violence in Medieval*

The love-death relationship in medieval literature has been the subject of considerable critical attention, particularly in the work of Chaucer, and in the numerous versions of *Tristan and Isolde*.<sup>7</sup> The nature of the love-death relationship underwent a significant and fascinating transformation in early modern literature, when writers and painters began to eroticize death. Philippe Ariès observes that, "A partir du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, et même à la fin du XV<sup>e</sup>, nous voyons les thèmes de la mort se charger d'un sens érotique . . . Du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, d'innombrables scènes ou motifs, dans l'art et dans la littérature, associent la mort à l'amour, Thanatos à Éros" ("At the end of the fifteenth century, we see the themes concerning death begin to take on an erotic meaning . . . From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, countless scenes or motifs in art and in literature associate death with love, Thanatos with Eros").<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising that sex, the union between man and woman that is at once supreme and elemental, should turn deadly in early modern literature, for, as Lawrence D. Kritzman contends, "what may be characterized as a power struggle, the inevitable war between the sexes, is a seminal *topos* in French Renaissance literature."<sup>9</sup>

Roger Stilling describes such a love-death opposition in *Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy*.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, here I would like to consider love and death as

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*Courtly Literature: A Casebook*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), 1–36; here 5. Classen points out the rapport between love and death: "Undoubtedly, when we examine love, violence, hatred, and aggression, we are exploring fundamental elements in human life that have proved to be both highly constructive and deconstructive if left all to themselves. In fact, all these outbursts of impulses and emotions—especially love, which can be violent and destructive—are uncannily related to each other, insofar as they all can lead to death, yet also can create new life. Violence often results from unrequited love, whereas love can transform the person acting most violently into a constructive member of society" (Classen, "Violence in the Shadows," 5).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "The Representation of the Lover's Death: Thomas' Tristan as Open Text," *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. Joan Tasker Grimbert (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 95–109; Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, "Lit d'amour, lit de mort: Thomas d'Angleterre et l'esthétique romanesque," *Le Moyen Age: Revue d'Histoire et de Philologie* 102, 3–4 (1996): 403–17; Joan Tasker Grimbert, "Love and Death? Reading Marie de France's Chievrefoil against Gédier's Roman de Tristan et Iseut," *Bibliographical Bulletin of the International Arthurian Society/Bulletin Bibliographique de la Société Internationale Arthuriennne* 52 (2000): 311–22; Marie-Noëlle Toury, "'Morant d'amour': Amour et mort dans le tome I du 'Tristan en prose,'" *Nouvelles recherches sur Le Tristan en prose*, ed. Jean Dufournet (Geneva: Slatkine, 1990), 173–90.

<sup>8</sup> Philippe Ariès, *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en occident du Moyen Age à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), 46–47. English translation is from Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 56–57.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence D. Kritzman, *The Rhetoric of Sexuality and the Literature of the French Renaissance* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 29. In his introduction, Kritzman, 4, explains that "The relationship between the sexes and the attempt to delineate the status of women and men was a major *topos* in French Renaissance texts."

<sup>10</sup> Roger Stilling, *Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University

co-existing forces, often in a causal relationship. At times love kills the lover or the beloved, at times it is simply sex that kills,<sup>11</sup> or lack of sex that kills.<sup>12</sup> The discovery of a sexual relationship can be deadly, particularly for women. But if sex can kill, it can also lead to immortality, as can the lack of sex, which, at certain times and under certain circumstances, is described as “chastity.” In this essay I will explore these variations on the relationship between sex and death, and the role that immortality plays in that relationship. While the sex-death link in English Renaissance literature has been examined in some depth, relatively little attention has been paid to early modern French literature in this regard.

We have long been warned that sex can kill, and I will begin with a literary figure who is defined by death, the widow.<sup>13</sup> A woman in novella 95 of Bonaventure Des Périers’s *Nouvelles Récréations et Joyeux Devis*<sup>14</sup> apparently kills her husband with excessive sex. In this novella, “D’un superstitieux medecin qui ne vouloit rire avec sa femme, sinon quand il pleuvoit, et de la bonne fortune de ladicté femme après son trespas”<sup>15</sup> (“Of a superstitious doctor who did not want

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Press, 1976), 67.

<sup>11</sup> Others have observed the relationship between sexual ecstasy and death. Jonathon Dollimore reminds us that “Sexual ecstasy might itself be a kind of death—an obliteration of identity, of self.” Jonathon Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 69. Bataille (*L’Érotisme*, 17) asserts that “De l’érotisme, il est possible de dire qu’il est l’approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort.” (“Eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death” [*Death and Sensuality*, 11]).

<sup>12</sup> According to Denis de Rougemont, celibacy represents a sort of death: “une chasteté volontaire, c’est un suicide symbolique,” *L’Amour et l’Occident* (Paris: Plon, 1972), 33 (“a self-imposed chastity is a symbolical suicide,” Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, trans. Montgomery Belgion [London: Faber and Faber, 1956], 55).

<sup>13</sup> For studies on widowhood in medieval and early modern French literature, see *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999); *Upon My Husband’s Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe*, ed. Louise Mirrer (Paris: Picard, 1992); *Veuves et Veuvage dans le haut moyen âge*, ed. M. Parisse (Paris: Picard, 1993); *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (Singapore: Longman; Harlow, U.K.; New York: Pearson Education Ltd., 1999); for the widow in medieval and early-modern German literature, see Albrecht Classen, “Witwen in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters: Neue Perspektiven auf ein vernachlässigtes Thema,” *Etudes Germaniques* 57, 2 (2002): 197–232. See also Britta-Juliane Kruse, *Witwen: Kulturgeschichte eines Standes in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> “Poet, humanist, grammarian, satirist, secretary, thinker—Bonaventure des Périers was all that and more, for, with the sole exception of his brilliant contemporary, Rabelais, Des Périers was also the most powerful, resourceful, and original of the sixteenth-century *conteurs*,” Bonaventure Des Périers, *Novel Pastimes and Merry Tales*, ed. and trans. Raymond C. La Charité and Virginia A. La Charité (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), 15. La Charité and La Charité describe the *Nouvelles Récréations et Joyeux Devis* as “a conglomerate of 90 light, good-natured, and amusing tales” (22).

<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure Des Périers, *Contes ou Nouvelles Récréations et joyeux devis suivis du Cymbalum mundi*,

to make merry with his wife except when it rained and the wife's good fortune after his death"), Des Périers recounts the tale of a woman married to a doctor who is convinced, because of his belief in astrological signs, that it would be harmful to him to have sexual relations with his wife in dry weather. This woman is typical of those we see in early modern literature: she yearns for physical pleasure to such a degree, in fact, that she decides to trick her superstitious husband into having sex with her. She devises a scheme with the help her chambermaid, whom she directs to take buckets of water to the roof. The maid is to let the water drip noisily through a pipe into the courtyard, simulating the sound of a rainfall. The wife awakens her doctor-husband, and convincing him that the dripping noise is rain, she manages to seduce him. The woman continues to keep up her ruse for "aucuns jours" (241; "several days," 211), Des Périers tells us, and she is decidedly satisfied and exceedingly happy. Unfortunately for the doctor, this increased sexual activity in dry weather may well have been "très contraire" (240; "very unfavorable," 210), just as he feared. Indeed, it appears to have been fatal, since his wife carries on her trick for only those "several days," when suddenly the doctor expires.

The widow in Pierre de Larivey's play, *La Vefve* (The Widow), is also portrayed as someone who would likely be fatal to a new husband. In this comedy of love, money, and mistaken identity, Mme Clemence, the title character, is sought after by a man named Ambroise, who covets her for her wealth. And though Mme Clemence is described by other characters in the play as *gentille* and entirely virtuous, she nevertheless inspires talk of the dangerous and deadly widow. Ambroise's brother tries to convince him not to seek Mme Clemence's hand in marriage, warning him that death at her hands (which would be inevitable, he declares) would be worse than execution by a firing squad. Death by firing squad is mercifully quick, he reminds the prospective groom, whereas "les femmes font mourir petit à petit"<sup>16</sup> (women kill little by little). This widow would exhaust Ambroise, his brother cautions him, recalling the stereotype of the sexually insatiable widow who would so tire a man that he would fear going to bed at night.

The deadly widow appears in Pierre de Brantôme's *Discours* as well.<sup>17</sup> The author claims that some women accidentally kill their spouses, while other wives

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ed. P. L. Jacob (1872; Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, 1937). This novella is included with those that are "attributed to" Des Périers. Translations of this text are from *Novel Pastimes and Merry Tales*.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre de Larivey, "La Vefve," *Ancien Théâtre français*, vol. 5 (Paris: P. Jannet, Libraire, 1855), 107–98; here 116, I, iii. Translations are my own.

<sup>17</sup> Robert D. Cottrell, *Brantôme: The Writer as Portraitist of His Age* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), 9, describes Brantôme as "One of the most prolific sixteenth-century French memorialists and chroniclers." As Cottrell explains, "his works have been considered one of the most precious sources of information on various aspects of life in sixteenth-century France" (9). Furthermore, "he is equally well known as an author of erotic tales" (10).

murder their husbands outright. Indeed, many more wives would like to do so. Brantôme describes one elderly widow who had buried three husbands and a young lover. She did not assassinate them, Brantôme explains, or poison them; it seems that she simply loved the poor men to death “par attenuation et alambiquement de leur substance”<sup>18</sup> (by the weakening and the distillation of their essence).

It was widely accepted during the early modern era that there were women who killed their husbands with their inordinate demands for sex, particularly older women. In *Les Quinze joies de mariage*, we learn that “continuacion d’une vieille femme abrege la vie d’un jeune home”<sup>19</sup> (a long relationship with an old woman shortens a young man’s life). Sadly for the young man, his wife will progressively deplete him of his “essence”, like Brantôme’s elderly widow: “La vieille le sechera tout” (XVI: 195) (The old woman will drain him dry).<sup>20</sup>

It was not just husbands who were in danger, however. In novella 26 of Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*,<sup>21</sup> the young lord d’Avannes is very nearly

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<sup>18</sup> Pierre de Bourdeilles Brantôme, *Oeuvres complètes de Pierre de Bourdeilles abbé et seigneur de Branthôme*, vol. XII (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1858–1895), 172.

<sup>19</sup> *Les Quinze Joyes de mariage* (Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, 1890), XIV: 194. Although this anonymous text first appeared ca. 1400, its popularity endured for centuries; editions of *Les Quinze Joyes* were published in France during the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See the introduction to *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage [Les .XV. Joies de Mariage]*, ed. and trans. Brent A. Pitts (New York, Berne, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Georges Bataille considers that socially acceptable sex, which, in early modern France generally means married sex, is safe; forbidden, erotic sex is associated with death: “Mais de quelque manière qu’on la prenne, jamais la sexualité humaine n’est admise qu’en des limites au delà desquelles elle est interdite. Il y a finalement, en tous lieux, un mouvement de la sexualité où l’ordure entre en jeu. Dès lors il ne s’agit plus de sexualité bénéfique «voulue de Dieu», mais bien de malédiction et de mort.” (*L’Erotisme*, 255) (“[H]owever it may be regarded, human sexuality is only ever admissible within certain limits, and outside these it is forbidden. There is everywhere in the long run a certain sexual impulse felt as unclean. From then on it is no longer a matter of beneficent sexuality ‘intended by God’ but rather of malediction and death” [*Death and Sensuality*, 230]).

<sup>21</sup> Marguerite d’Angoulême (1492–1549), queen of Navarre, was sister of the French king François I, a devoted patron of the arts and an accomplished author in her own right. Her *Heptaméron*, a collection of novellas modeled upon Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, was first published in 1558 as *Histoire des Amans Fortunés*. In the following year it was published under the title of *Heptaméron*. Colette H. Winn, “L’Expérience de la mort dans *La Navire* de Marguerite de Navarre: Mysticisme et création poétique” *Love and Death in the Renaissance*, 199–219; here 214, note 1, reveals the link between passion and death in *L’Heptaméron*: “Dans *L’Heptaméron*, ed. Michel François (Paris: Garnier, 1967), la passion, le désir amoureux de possession et de jouissance, se charge d’une violence dégradante et conduit l’homme à la mort (mort que, selon les cas, il cause ou subit . . .)” (In the *Heptameron*, passion, the amorous desire for possession and for pleasure, is suffused with immoral sordid violence and leads man to death (a death which, depending upon the situation, he causes or suffers . . .)).

killed by excessive sex with a lady who is “fort legiere et belle”<sup>22</sup> (“flighty” and “very attractive”).<sup>23</sup> And: “Ainsy vesquit ceste jeune dame, soubz l’ypocrisie et habit de femme de bien, en telle volupté, que raison, conscience, ordre ne mesure n’avoient plus de lieu en elle. Ce que ne peut porter longuement la jeunesse et delicate complexion du seigneur d’Avannes, mais commença à devenir tant pasle et meigre, que . . . on le pouvoit bien desconnoistre.” (212–13; “Thus in the hypocritical guise of a virtuous wife, the lady lived a life of such sensual pleasure that reason, conscience, order and moderation no longer had any place in her. But the delicate constitution of d’Avannes, who after all was still very young, could not tolerate this state of affairs for long. He became so pale and thin that . . . you would not have recognized him,” 297). Eventually d’Avannes falls ill. He recovers his strength only after leaving the lady’s home and taking to bed for weeks, eating only light and nourishing food.

These tales of men dying, or nearly dying, in the beds of oversexed women conform to the medieval and early modern notion that held that women were sexually insatiable and incapable of restraining themselves. Claude Thomasset reminds us that during the Middle Ages, “The sexual capacity of women was particularly troubling . . . . The female was impossible to satisfy.”<sup>24</sup> Margaret L. King affirms that early modern women, too, “were seen as possessing a greater sexual appetite, one quite gross and uncontrollable: a construct of the philosophers, theologians, physicians, and writers of books. Their violent sexual passions disrupted the sexual order and were seen as an attack on the social order itself.”<sup>25</sup>

Although sex itself was fatal to some men, for women it was more often the revelation of their sexual activity that killed them rather than the sex act itself. In novella 36 of *L’Heptaméron*, for example, we discover an older gentleman, the President of Grenoble, who has a very beautiful and, unfortunately, restless wife.

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<sup>22</sup> Marguerite de Navarre, *L’Heptaméron*, ed. Michel François (Paris: Bordas, 1991), 210.

<sup>23</sup> English translations of *L’Heptaméron* are from Marguerite de Navarre, *The Heptameron*, ed. and trans. P. A. Chilton (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 294.

<sup>24</sup> Claude Thomasset, “The Nature of Women,” *A History of Women in the West*, Vol. 2: “Silences of the Middle Ages,” ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 43–69; here 62. Thomasset points out that “Ribald literature, particularly the *fabliaux*, made the most of this troubling female power” (“The Nature of Women,” 62).

<sup>25</sup> Margaret L. King *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 41. Barbara A. Hanawalt, “Widows,” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 58–69; here 60, observes that “The Church followed the lead of male scholars (and poets) who suggested that women’s sexual appetites were voracious and, once unleashed, difficult to manage.” See also Natalie Zemon Davis “Women on Top,” *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979), 124–51.

When this President discovers that his wife is having an affair with a young clerk, he orders the clerk to leave and never to return. The unfaithful wife is not so lucky. One lovely day in May, the President “alla cuyllir en son jardin une sallade de telles herbes, que, si tost que sa femme en eust mangé, ne vesquit pas vingt quatre heures” (263; “went into his garden and picked some herbs for a salad. After eating it, his wife does not live more than twenty-four hours,” 355). The President makes a great show of grief after his wife’s death, hiding the fact that he secretly executed her; he thus avenges himself and, according to the novella’s narrator, “saulva l’honneur de sa maison” (263; “saved the honour of his house,” 355).

Bonaventure Des Périers recounts a similar fate for the unfaithful wife in tale 90 of his *Nouvelles Récréations et joyeux devis*. Unlike the murderous husband in *L’Heptaméron* who banished his wife’s lover but apparently had no intention of killing him, Des Périers’s cuckold was prepared to kill his wife, or her lover, or both, whichever opportunity presented itself. It turns out to be more convenient to kill his faithless wife, so he conspires to have her thrown into a river by an over-thirsty mule that is denied water for two days after being fed salty oats. The poor woman, and even Des Périers calls her a “povre damoiselle” (229), drowns. The narrator of this tale admits that this means of vengeance is a bit cruel and inhuman, but, he concludes, “Mais que voulez-vous? Il fasche à un mary d’estre cocu en sa propre personne” (229; “But what do you expect? It angers a husband to see himself a cuckold,” 199).

The murders in these two tales, both committed by men, have an oddly feminine aspect. The President in *L’Heptaméron* makes his wife a salad with poisonous herbs, and feeds it to her. The angry husband in Des Périers’s tale has the diet of a mule manipulated so that it would be desperate for water and therefore drown the woman riding him. Neither man is in the remotest danger, both sit idly by as their wives perish—these are hardly tales of swashbuckling battles, of winning by strength or valor. These are murders by malevolent feeding.<sup>26</sup> One is left to wonder: is a cuckold automatically weak? Is he necessarily less than a man? If there is a warning in these stories, it is perhaps not a warning to women not to be unfaithful to their husbands—they can’t help themselves anyway, as we’ve already seen. It is perhaps a warning to men that if they are cuckolded, they have lost all semblance of manliness—even their vengeance lacks masculinity.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> David M. Turner, *Fashioning Adultery*, 124, remarks that “Poison was popularly seen as a woman’s weapon, both practically as the preparation of food and drink was part of women’s domestic work, and symbolically, representing women’s supposed natural duplicity.”

<sup>27</sup> This intense fear of being cuckolded is evident in French literature from the medieval fabliaux through the seventeenth-century plays of Molière, most particularly *Sganarelle* (1660) and *L’École des femmes* (1663). See Christopher Braider, “Image and Imaginaire in Molière’s *Sganarelle*, ou le cocu imaginaire,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 117, 5 (Oct 2002): 1142–57; Jonathan Carson, “On Molière’s Debt to Scarron for *Sganarelle*, ou Le Cocu imaginaire,”

Some women die, then, from being too extravagant and careless in their sexual activity. Others perish from trying to protect their chastity, and in these cases we will see that sex can sometimes lead to immortality, but only, it seems, by a tragic path. In the second novella of her *Heptaméron*, Marguerite de Navarre recounts the story of the virtuous wife of a mule-driver. One day, after the mule-driver leaves home to collect his pay, his servant, who has long been enamored with the mule-driver's wife, sneaks into her bedroom and attempts to take by force what she has long denied him. The woman leaps from her bed and tries to escape her attacker, but he stabs her several times, and when she is finally too weak to resist, he rapes her. She offers up her soul to God and then "avecq un visaige joyeux, les oeilz eslevez au ciel, rendit ce chaste corps son ame à son Createur" (20; "with joy on her face, and her eyes turned heavenwards, her soul left this chaste body to return to its Creator," 81). Dying in such a fashion, in an unsuccessful and fatal attempt to resist being raped, earns this young woman the title of "martire de chasteté" (21; "martyr of chastity," 81) in her own time and her own town: "toutes les femmes de bien de la ville ne faillirent à faire leur devoir de l'honorer autant qu'il estoit possible" (21; "All the virtuous women of the town were present, as was their duty, to do all possible honour to her name," 81). But her virtuous reputation lives on after her, and profoundly affects others. The narrator of this tragic tale tells us that seeing the respect paid to this "martyr" inspired women of wanton ways to resolve to reform their lives. Furthermore, the narrator remarks that this story should strengthen the resolve of her listeners, so that they might "garder ceste belle vertu de chasteté" (21; "preserve this most glorious virtue, chastity," 81). Thus, the virtuous mule-driver's wife lives on after her murder as an inspiration to others; her lesson and her chastity become immortal.

There are other tales of attempted rape in *L'Heptaméron*, other instances of rebuffed suitors who sneak into the beds of the women they had long pursued, but the target of their passion, the victims in these stories, do not attain immortality because they do not die. One such example is the widowed princess in novella 4, another virtuous woman who is, as it turns out, a bit too lively and vivacious for her own good. A charming and handsome "gentleman" is enamored of her, and although she refuses his amorous overtures, she continues to enjoy his company and his conversation. One night he slips into her room and climbs into bed with her, uninvited. She fights him off and cries out for help, at which point the

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*Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 25, 49 (1998): 545–54; Harold C. Knutson, "The Cuckold Triangle in Molière's *L'École des femmes* and in Wycherley's *The Country Wife*," *Création et Recréation: Un Dialogue entre Littérature et Histoire*, ed. Claire Gaudiani and Jacqueline Van Baelen (Tübingen: Etudes Littéraires Françaises 58, 1993): 125–34. See also Brigitte Schneider-Pachaly, "Der betrogene Ehemann: Konstanz und Wandlung eines literarischen Motivs in Frankreich und Italien bis zum 17. Jahrhundert," Ph.D. dissertation, Universität Freiburg i. Br. 1970.



nobleman flees. Tempted to accuse her assailant publicly, the princess is, in the end, convinced by her lady-in-waiting to keep the entire episode a secret in order to preserve her reputation. The wise, elderly woman warns her that not only would people believe that he had had his way with her, but they would blame her for it; she explains: "il n'y a nul en ceste court, qu'il ne voye la bonne chere que bous faictes au gentil homme dont vous avez soupson." (32; "There isn't a single person at this court who hasn't seen the encouraging way you treat the man you are now suspecting," 94). The princess escapes an attempted rape, she manages to guard her chastity, but in order to preserve her honor she will have to do so anonymously, secretly. For this princess there is no sex, no death, no glory, no immortality: she avoids a rape, she survives the attack, but because of her self-imposed silence, she is denied the enduring acclaim due a "martyr of chastity." Novella 62 of *L'Heptaméron* also features a young and virtuous noblewoman who had been pursued for several years by an amorous neighbor. Very early one morning, while the noblewoman's husband is absent, the neighbor creeps into her bedroom and into her bed. Despite her protests, he rapes her. Had she called out for help, she might have been spared being raped, but she keeps quiet because she is more terrified that her reputation might be ruined by the discovery of a man in her bed than she is of being attacked. Unfortunately for this woman, the assault does eventually come to light, and her honor is lost. Rather than having her memory live in glory, the woman's reputation is ruined because she does not die as a result of the attack, nor does she kill herself afterward to avoid disgust at the mere memory of the episode, which Parmentaire, one of the narrators of this collection of tales, seems to suggest that she should have done.

If sex kills rather regularly in early modern French literature, lack of sex is also characterized as potentially deadly. In novella 64 of his *Nouvelles Récréations et joyeux devis*, Bonaventure Des Périers tells of the amorous adventures of a certain youth from Paris. He is in love with a very pretty woman who is, the narrator tells us, "fort contente de se veoir aymée" (237; "very happy to be loved," 160). She is also a widow, which means that she is sexually experienced, and indeed sexually available in a way in which a maiden or a married woman would not be. This pretty widow is what we would call in modern parlance, a "tease," tempting the young man but refusing to grant him her favors: "Elle vous sçavoit mener ce jeune homme . . . de telle ruse: qu'elle sembloit tout vouloir faire pour luy. Il parloit à elle seul à seule, il manioit le tetin, et baisoit voire: et touchoit bien souvent à la chair, Mais il n'en tastoit point" (237; "[S]he knew how to lead on this young man . . . to such an extent that she seemed willing to do everything for him. He spoke to her in private; he kissed and played with her breasts and he even touched her flesh frequently, but he never got any," 160). Being denied sex proves nearly fatal for the young man: "il mourroit tout en vie aupres d'elle" (237; "he almost died whenever he was with her," 160). In the end he tricks her into having sex with him

by disguising himself: he has only to don beggar's clothes and smear his face to render himself unrecognizable, and he pretends to be too much of a fool to reveal their liaison, so she welcomes this handsome "stranger" into her bed. His life is thus saved and her reputation is ruined, for in order to make his triumph over her complete, he reveals their nocturnal activities at a social gathering.<sup>28</sup>

In novella 26 of *L'Heptaméron*, the story in which the young Lord d'Avannes is nearly killed by excessive sex with an attractive and flighty young lady, we discover another young woman, this one beautiful and married to another man, but loved by d'Avannes and secretly in love with him. This woman, rather than nearly killing d'Avannes with excessive sex like the first woman in the tale, herself dies from keeping her love secret. That is to say, she dies from an excess of self-denial.<sup>29</sup> The narrator explains:

"plus la vertu empeschoit son oeil et contenance de monstrier la flamme cachée, plus elle se augmentoit et devenoit importable, en sorte que, ne povant porter la guerre que l'amour et l'honneur faisoient en son cuer, laquelle toutesfois avoit delibéré de jamays ne monstrier, ayant perdu la consolation de la veue et parolle de celluy pour qui elle vivoit, tumba en une fievre continue, causée d'un humeur melencolicque." (217)

[“the more virtue prevented the hidden flame from showing itself in her eyes and in the expression on her face, the hotter it grew and the more unbearable it became. In the end, she was unable to endure the war in her heart between love and honour. It was a war that she had, however, resolved never to reveal, and deprived of the consolation of being able to see and speak to the man was life itself to her, she fell into a continuous fever due to a melancholic humour.” (301–02)]

The woman knows that the cause of her impending demise is her hidden love for the young man, and in fact welcomes a death that would spare her reputation and protect her conscience because it would prevent her from acting upon her

<sup>28</sup> Note of the editor: This is, of course, a very old theme, whether we think of the poem “Farai un vers, pos mi sonelh” by the first troubadour, Guillaume IX, or some of the *Folie de Tristan*.

<sup>29</sup> This is not the only tale in *L'Heptaméron* where the author seems to criticize excessive self-control. In novella 30, as Albrecht Classen points out in section 9 of the Introduction to this volume, “The Erotic, Sexuality, and the Pornographic?,” a young widow, after having abstained from sexual activity for years, suddenly gives in to her suppressed desire for pleasure and commits incest with her teenaged son. The narrator of this tale blames the mother's sudden and tragic weakness on her regrettable self-restraint, which he compares to “l’eau par force retenue [qui] court avecq plus d’impetuosité quant on la laisse aller, que celle qui court ordinairement” (*L'Heptaméron*, 230) (“the dammed-up torrent [that] flows more impetuously than the freely flowing stream” [*The Heptameron*, 318]). Like some of the women in Marie de France's *Lais*, this woman becomes pregnant as a result of her illicit sexual encounter. See Molly Robinson Kelly, “Sex and Fertility in Marie de France's *Lais*,” in this volume.

passions. Following a deathbed confession of her love for d'Avannes and a lovers' farewell embrace, the beautiful young woman succumbs.

Lack of sex, then, can be deadly, whether it is due to self-denial or to unrequited love. At times, death from lack of sex is self-inflicted. In her *Heptaméron*, Marguerite de Navarre uses suicide as a solution to the problem of lost love.<sup>30</sup> Novella 50 is the story of Jehan Pietre, and a "certain lady" whom he has loved for a long time. Although she loves Jehan Pietre back with all her heart, she refuses to grant him what he desires of her, not believing his love to be true. Jehan Pietre falls into a profound melancholy, and his doctors, believing that he suffers an obstruction in the liver, prescribe a bleeding. The lady, deeply distraught that she has caused his suffering, has a message sent to him: "puis qu'elle congnoissoit que son amour estoit veritable et non faincte, elle estoit deliberée de tout luy accorder ce que si long temps luy avoit refusé" (324; "that the lady now recognized that his love was true, that she had decided to grant him that which she had for so long refused," 424). Finally the lovers meet, and the poor Jehan Pietre is in such a state of rapture that he does not notice that the bandages covering his recent wound have come loose. He bleeds so profusely that he falls dead at the feet of the lady he has long adored. The narrator of this tale blames the lady for Jehan Pietre's death. He was, the narrator tells us: "un si parfaict amy, de la mort duquel elle estoit la seule cause" (325; "so perfect a lover, whose death she alone had caused," 425). Like the narrator of this tale, the lady blames herself for Jehan Pietre's death, and resolves not to live without him, but instead die with him. She stabs herself with his sword and falls dead upon his lifeless body.

Marguerite de Navarre's novella 70 is another tale of love turned deadly. It tells the story of a secret but happy love affair between a young nobleman and the *dame du Vergier*. Unfortunately, the young man is forced to disclose the identity of the woman he loves, who subsequently dies as a result of his betrayal. The young nobleman believes that he is responsible for the death of his beloved (because he had revealed their love), and so he concludes that he too must die. He draws his dagger and stabs himself in the heart, as did the lady grieving over Jehan Pietre's death. The young nobleman in novella 70 is killed by his unwillingness to live without the woman he loved.<sup>31</sup>

In the category of "lack of sex kills," we must also consider some of the early modern retellings of the story of Judith, the Biblical heroine who seduced

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<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of suicide in this text, as well as attitudes toward suicide in Renaissance France, see Kathleen M. Llewellyn, "Love, Death and the Question of Suicide in the *Heptameron* of Marguerite de Navarre," *Amour, passion, volupté, tragédie: Le sentiment amoureux dans la littérature française du Moyen Age au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Annye Castonguay, Jean-François Kosta-Théfaine, and Marianne Legault (Paris: Séguier, 2007), 83–97.

<sup>31</sup> This tale, like others in *L'Heptaméron*, recalls the myth of Pyramus and Thisbe related by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*.

Holofernes, an Assyrian general and mortal enemy of the Jews. However, rather than sharing his bed, Judith beheaded the general, thus saving her people. Judith was a popular figure in the religious discourse of the early modern era, and in what follows I will briefly examine three versions of her story, the play *Le Mystère de Judith et Holofernés* (ca. 1508), whose author is believed to be Jean Molinet, and two epic poems, one by Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas (1579) and one by Gabrielle de Coignard (1594).

Holofernes is, at least to a degree, characterized as a courtly lover (obsessed, suffering, extravagantly praising the woman he idolizes) in all three of these texts, which justifies the inclusion of these representations of the story of Judith in this discussion of deadly and dying lovers. In Molinet's *Mystère de Judith et Holofernés*, the general treats Judith with exaggerated, courtly courtesy when she first arrives in the enemy camp. He declares: "Toute ma richesse et tresor / Habandonne du tout a vous"<sup>32</sup> ("All the treasure I possess / I am willing to give to you"), and

Sur tous  
Je suis celuy qui vueil garder  
Et de pouoir contregarder  
L'honneur des dames." (ll. 1836–39)

[ More than most  
I am a man eager to protect,  
And to do his utmost to defend,  
The honour of a lady."]

And yet, in the event that his attempt at seduction fails, he is more than ready to rape her; he sends his servant to Judith with the message:

... monseigneur est de tel flame  
Enflambé touchant vostre amour  
Que, pour apaiser sa clamour,  
Vous fault par amoureux deduit  
Coucher avec luy ceste nuit,  
Ou, bref, il vous fera mourir. (ll. 1986–91)

[ "... love has so inflamed my lord  
With passion and desire for you  
That, in order to assuage his ardour,  
He insists that, to gratify him,

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<sup>32</sup> Jean Molinet, *Le Mystère de Judith et Holofernés*, ed. Graham A. Runnalls (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1995), ll. 1834–35. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from Jean Molinet, *Judith and Holofernes*, ed. and trans. Graham A. Runnalls (Fairview, NC: Pegasus Press, 2002).

You must sleep with him tonight;  
Otherwise he will put you to death.”]

Fundamentally, then, Holofernes proves himself to be less a pining and submissive *serviteur* than a potentially murderous rapist bent on carrying out his nefarious plan. Furthermore, although Molinet’s Holofernes claims courtly humility: he announces: “Courage paulmé” (l. 1823) (“my courage is failing”), he nevertheless responds to Judith’s profuse flattery, “Hault chef renommé, / De noble proesse, / Reluisant noblesse” (ll. 1824–26) (“Most famous leader, / Reputed for his prowess, / Dazzling nobility,”), with a self-satisfied “Bien nommé!” (l. 1827) (“Well spoken!”) Clearly he suffers more from the sin of pride than he does from an excess of modesty.<sup>33</sup> In the realm of sex and death, Holofernes claims, like many early modern poets, to be dying from love: “frappé en suis jucu’au mourir.” (l. 1965) (“My love is torturing me to death.”) Although the general is surely speaking figuratively, as it turns out he is quite right, for his infatuation with Judith causes him to drink such an excess of wine that he slips into a drunken stupor which provides her with the opportunity to behead him with his own sword.

In *La Judit*, an epic poem by Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas (1544–1590), the reader is reminded of Holofernes’s evil nature when Judith first encounters him. Du Bartas describes the general as a fearsome beast who was born in another world: “Quelque beste effroyable en autre monde née”<sup>34</sup> and reveals that Judith trembles in fear at the sight of him. Nevertheless, du Bartas describes Holofernes as courteous, “courtois” (4:372), and tells us that he reassures Judith with his charming words: “Mais par un doux langage / Le courtois general luy redonne courage” (4:371–72), and he addresses her as “M’amour,” (4:381) “My love.” Like Molinet’s Holofernes, du Bartas’s general is obsessed with Judith. In typical courtly fashion, Holofernes thinks of Judith day and night, and is in fact distracted from his military objectives by his beautiful guest: “Plustost que ce tyran fut aveuglé d’amour / A surprendre la ville il pensoit nuict et jour; / Or’ nuict et jour il pense à surprendre une dame” (5:27–29; Suddenly this tyrant was blinded by love / He had been thinking day and night of his attack on the city; / Now, day and night, he thought only of conquering a woman). We are reminded of Chrétien de Troyes’s Lancelot, jousting before an audience that included his beloved Guenièvre, gazing at her rather than facing his foe, losing the battle when she commands him to do so, winning only when she gives him permission. du Bartas’s

<sup>33</sup> Graham Runnalls, *Judith and Holofernes*, 22, points out that “His attempt to pass himself off as a follower of courtly love in order to win the affection of the respectable Judith is patently absurd.”

<sup>34</sup> Guillaume de Salluste du Bartas, *La Judit*, (Toulouse: Association des publications de la faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Toulouse, 1971), book 4: 336. This poem was first published in 1574. All translations of *La Judit* by du Bartas are my own.

Holofernes is blinded by love, wounded by love,<sup>35</sup> conquered by love: "Puis que je suis vaincu par le foible pouvoir / D'une esclave Judit?" (5:55–56; Can it be that I am vanquished by the feeble power of this slave, Judith?).

He claims to be a slave to the woman he adores: "Mais je suis bien celuy dont le coeur jadis brave / S'est fait en moins d'un rien esclave d'une esclave." (5:69–70) (It is I whose heart used to be brave / But in no time I have become the slave of a slave). Yet he is no true courtly lover, for rather than charm his lovely guest with eloquent declarations of love when she joins him for dinner, he rambles on for hundreds of lines about his military exploits, and the narrator informs us that only half of his bragging is true: "[Il] fait un long recit de ses deportemens, / Moitié vray, moitié faux." (5: 440–41; [He] recites at length his exploits, / Half true, half false). Finally, inebriated, Holofernes strips off his clothes and, naked, climbs into bed and drops off into drunken sleep, at which point Judith executes him.

Gabrielle de Coignard also portrays Holofernes as an impossibly flawed courtly lover in her epic poem, *Imitation de la victoire de Judich*.<sup>36</sup> Coignard's Holofernes is weakened by love. At the very sight of Judith, the general's savagery is transformed into devotion: "Il humoit par les yeux cest amoureux venin, / Changeant en douce amour sa cruauté farouche"<sup>37</sup> ("He breathed in love's poison through his eyes / Changing into sweet love his fierce cruelty"). His barbarous strength dissolves as he gazes upon the beautiful Judith: "Il fut tout esperdu et sa cruelle force / Se fondit comme cire au feu de ceste amorce" (ll. 945–46; He was utterly lost and his cruel strength / melted like wax in the flame of her charms). His heart is imprisoned by her: "Son coeur fut garotté d'une chaisne de fer" (947; His heart was bound by a chain of iron) and it suffers the pain that is courtly love; Holofernes laments: "Mon coeur est tenaillé d'amoureuse detresse" (1138; My heart is tortured by lover's grief). Holofernes praises, elegantly and at length, Judith's singular beauty, grace, charm, and eloquence.

... qui vit jamais en tout cest Univers /  
Tant d'attraitz dans un corps et tant d'appas divers? /

<sup>35</sup> Holofernes calls love "une incurable playe" (5:34) (an incurable wound).

<sup>36</sup> This 1548-line poem is included in Gabrielle de Coignard's *Oeuvres chrétiennes*, which were first published in 1594, after the poet's death. Little is known about Coignard, a Toulousain poet. She married Pierre de Mansencal in 1570, but he died only three years later, and she never remarried. For more on the life and work of Gabrielle de Coignard, see Gabrielle de Coignard, *Oeuvres Chrétiennes*, ed. Colette H. Winn (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1995); Gabrielle de Coignard, *Spiritual Sonnets: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Melaie E. Gregg (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Terrance Cave, *Devotional Poetry in France, c. 1570–1630* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1969); and Huguette Renée Kaiser's dissertation, "Gabrielle de Coignard: Poëtesse dévote," Ph.D. thesis, Atlanta: Emory University, 1975.

<sup>37</sup> Gabrielle de Coignard, *Oeuvres Chrétiennes*, ll. 972–73. All translations of this text are my own.

Je croy qu'il n'y a point de telle femme au monde, /  
Si plaine de beauté, de grace et de faconde. (1063–66)

[Who has ever seen in all the universe  
So many charms in one body and such feminine allure  
I think there is not another woman in the world  
So full of beauty and grace, and so eloquent.]

Furthermore, Holofernes considers himself a perfect lover, a “parfait amant” (1163). Colette H. Winn points out that when he is with Judith, Holofernes behaves in a courtly fashion,<sup>38</sup> more so than his counterpart in du Bartas’s *La Judit*, who announces that he can take what he feels is his due, including the beautiful and virtuous Judith. Nonetheless, Coignard’s Holofernes is no admirable hero, he is evil incarnate. When she first introduces Holofernes to her readers, Coignard describes the horror of his military victories:

. . . ce tiran qui tout le monde effroye,  
Faisoit couler le sang de mainte et mainte playe,  
Allant par tous les coings du monde universel,  
Jusques dans le pays des enfans d’Israel, (157–60)

[This tyrant, who terrorizes everyone,  
Made blood run from countless wounds,  
Overtaking all corners of the earth,  
Until he finally reached the land of the children of Israel.]

In each of these texts, the dangerous but ultimately doomed enemy general appears as a counterfeit courtly lover, a role he does *not* play in the Biblical version of Judith’s story.<sup>39</sup> This suggests that these early modern authors felt compelled to cast Holofernes as a recognizable figure, if not a stock character, in their retelling of this popular story, so that the tale would follow, to a recognizable degree, the sex-and-death pattern of so much early modern love literature. Inevitably, though, it is clear that it simply was not possible to make Holofernes truly courtly,<sup>40</sup> nor

<sup>38</sup> “Holopherne se conduit avec Judith de manière courtoise” (Holofernes conducts himself with Judith in a courtly manner), *Oeuvres Chrétienues*, 439, note 224.

<sup>39</sup> In the Biblical version of the story of Judith, (*The Apocrypha: An American Translation*, trans. Edgar J. Goodspeed, New York: Random House, 1989), Holofernes does attempt to reassure the newly arrived Judith. He says: “Take courage, lady, do not be afraid in your heart, for I never hurt anyone who has chosen to serve Nebuchadnezzar” (11:1), and adds that she will be treated as well as the slaves of that king (11:4). However, he does not treat the heroine with exaggerated courtesy, nor does he play the humble, submissive lover or declare that he is in danger of dying from unrequited love. Furthermore, although the Biblical Holofernes lusts after Judith, “he was exceedingly desirous of intimacy with her” (12:16), and “was delighted with her” (12:20), he is not obsessed with Judith as are his early modern counterparts.

<sup>40</sup> Holofernes’s unconsciousness at the moment of his death further marks him as un-heroic. As Philippe Ariès observes, from the Middle Ages onward, an honorable man, whether valorous

was it desirable from a narrative standpoint.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the manner in which the general failed to fit that role—he is base and beastly, not a charming lover—justifies his brutal execution at the hands of his love object, or more accurately, his lust object, who is allowed to kill him physically rather than figuratively, and with a gruesome blow rather than with a poetic flourish.

If lack of sex could be fatal, it might also lead to immortality. Although the enemy general Holofernes dies, his executioner, Judith, attains a glorious and immortal reputation as a result of their encounter, their unconsummated encounter. However, a chaste woman did not have to be a Biblical heroine in order to attain undying acclaim.

As it turns out, if the love object, man or woman, were desirable enough, he or she could achieve everlasting praise simply by saying “no,” as long as there was a poet there to record that negative response. It has long been recognized that poets expected to confer immortality both on themselves and on their subjects by writing them into poems, and French Renaissance poets enthusiastically embraced that ancient tradition as well.<sup>42</sup>

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knight or pious monk, would know that he was about to die: “[I]ls sont avertis. On ne meurt pas sans avoir eu le temps de savoir qu’on allait mourir.” (*Essais sur l’histoire de la mort*, 18) ([T]hey were usually forewarned. They did not die without having had time to realize that they were going to die” [*Western Attitudes Toward Death*, 2–3]). Holofernes, in his drunken stupor, is utterly unaware of his looming death and therefore cannot die as a hero must: with regret, the pardon of those he has harmed or offended, and prayers to God. Even the place of Holofernes’s death, alone with Judith in his private tent, is inappropriate for a hero, who must die in public, in a sort of ceremony that he himself conducts: “la mort est une cérémonie publique et organisée. Organisée par le mourant lui-même qui la préside et en connaît le protocole” (23; “death was a ritual organized by the dying person himself, who presided over it and knew its protocol,” 11).

41 One cannot help but remark a certain number of parallels between the faux-courtly Holofernes and the “hero” of the late-medieval German tale, *Der turnei von dem zers* (The Tournament for the Penis) analyzed by Albrecht Classen in “Sexual Desire and Pornography: Literary Imagination in a Satirical Context. Gender Conflict, Sexual Identity, and Misogyny in the ‘Nonnenturnier,’” in this volume. As Classen points out, while traditionally it was the knight who relentlessly pursued his ladylove, the protagonist of *Der turnei von dem zers*, like Holofernes, was sought out and seduced. The young man in *Der turnei* proved himself in the battle of tournaments, and Holofernes was a feared and respected general, a highly successful warrior. Most strikingly, the knight in *Der turnei von dem zers* castrates himself, literally, and Holofernes is at least partly responsible for his own figurative castration: he drinks himself into a stupor and isolates himself from his guards, whereupon Judith, having sought out the and seduced the general, uses his own sword to behead him.

42 Edelgard DuBruck, *The Theme of Death in French Poetry of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, (London, The Hague, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1964), 105, explains that “Unlike ordinary people, a poet, theoretically, did not need to be concerned about death: Pindar had insisted that poets were immortal by their communication with the Muses as well as by their works. At the same time, poets thought to immortalize the person whose praise they sang. Ronsard and other Pléiade poets, furthermore, repeated after Horace the conviction that the poetic monument outlasts marble and bronze.” See also DuBruck’s fine study of the evolution of Ronsard’s treatment of death and



What I propose to explore next, in examples from the poetry of Pierre de Ronsard and Louise Labé, is the blatant reference to immortality, the conscious and intentional manipulation of the beloved with the promise of immortality and the threat of *oubli*, the threat of oblivion. The Renaissance writer and his or her reader were both clearly conscious of this promise and its attendant threat. Life is inevitably, undeniably, as we witness before our very eyes, terminal. We are all going to die, and we know it. Most likely those who lived during the Renaissance knew this far better than we, as Vanessa Harding observes: "Death was a recurrent feature of life in the early modern city; the death of the other was all around, the death of the self never far off."<sup>43</sup> So an anxiety about out-living this fleeting life inevitably ensued. The poet may have preached *carpe diem*, but he promised *live forever*, and he threatened *forever forgotten*.

One of Pierre de Ronsard's best known poems, certainly in our day, is "Quand vous serez bien vieille" (When you are very old), sonnet XLIII from his Second Livre des Sonnets pour Hélène:<sup>44</sup>

Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir à la chandelle,  
Assise auprès du feu, devidant et filant,  
Direz chantant mes vers, en vous esmerveillant,  
Ronsard me celebrait du temps que j'étois belle.

Lors, vous n'aurez servante oyant telle nouvelle,  
Desjà sous le labeur à demy sommeillant,

Qui au bruit de mon nom ne s'aille resveillant,  
Benissant vostre nom de louange immortelle.

Je seray sous la terre et fantôme sans os  
Par les ombres myrteux je prendray mon repos;  
Vous serez au fouyer une vieille accroupie,

Regrettant mon amour et vostre fier desdain.  
Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain :  
Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie.

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immortality in his elegies, in chapter iv "Renaissance Contributions to French Poetry on Death" of *The Theme of Death in French Poetry*, 100–19.

<sup>43</sup> Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500–1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 269. Jonathan Dollimore remarks that anxiety about death is evident in the literature of the time: "This immanence of death preoccupied many early modern writers" (*Death, Desire and Loss*, 68).

<sup>44</sup> Pierre de Ronsard, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, ed. Jean Céard, Daniel Ménager and Michael Simonin (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 400–01. Unless otherwise noted, translations are from *Lyrics of the French Renaissance: Marot, Du Bellay, Ronsard*, ed. Norman R. Shapiro and Hope Glidden, trans. Norman R. Shapiro (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 301.

[When you are very old, by candle's flame,  
Spinning beside the fire, at end of day,

Singing my verse, admiring, you will say:  
"When I was fair, Ronsard's muse I became."

Your servant then, some weary old beldame—  
Whoever she may be—nodding away,  
Hearing "Ronsard," will shake off sleep, and pray  
Your name be blessed, to live in deathless fame.

Buried, I shall a fleshless phantom be,  
Hovering by the shadowed myrtle tree;  
You, by the hearth, a pining crone, bent low,

Whose pride once scorned my love, much to your sorrow.  
Heed me, live for today, wait not the morrow:  
Gather life's roses while still fresh they grow.]

Ronsard warns his beloved that if she disdains him she will one day regret not having "loved" him. She will be old, bent, alone, a fate worse than death, as Cathy Yandell reminds us.<sup>45</sup> And she will remember Ronsard's verses, for *he* will be immortal, a poet still famous long after his death. She will remember that he lauded her beauty in her young days: "Ronsard me celebrait du temps que j'étois belle." The poet promises her life if she "loves" him, that is, if she has sexual relations with him: "Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain." He advises her to gather those rosebuds: "Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie." However, paradoxically, if she were to do so, he would no longer have any reason to try to seduce her with poetry, with his immortal words—she would thereby lose her opportunity for immortality. So, here again, sex is in a sense deadly.<sup>46</sup> This sonnet does not represent Ronsard's only use of this theme and this threat. In "Je vous envoie un bouquet" from his *Second Livre des Amours*,<sup>47</sup> Ronsard compares the beauty of the flowers he had plucked to the charms of the destinataire. Both are

<sup>45</sup> Cathy Yandell, *Carpe Corpus* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, and London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 70, points out that in a number of Ronsard's poems, "Aging appears as a threat greater than death to the addressee." She observes say that: "Youth—or a youthful appearance—constitutes a prerequisite, a sine qua non, for beautiful women in early modern texts" (*Carpe Corpus*, 45).

<sup>46</sup> Yandell maintains that the subject of this poem, Hélène, appears "more ghostlike than the dead poet" (*Carpe Corpus*, 61). Ronsard, even after his death, will retain the power to awe his readers; he will remain famous. Furthermore "Whereas Hélène's position huddling near the fire evinces her body's frailty and an ultimate sense of absence, the reference to Ronsard's remains resting under the shady myrtle tree denotes peace and plenitude. By virtue of its perpetual greenness, myrtle is associated with immortality. (Read: Ronsard is still alive)" (*Carpe Corpus*, 62).

<sup>47</sup> Pierre de Ronsard, *Oeuvres complètes*, 270. This collection is sometimes anthologized as "Les Amours de Marie." Translations of this sonnet are my own.

lovely, but both will quickly fade and perish: “Le tems s’en va, le tems s’en va, ma Dame” (Time flies, time flies, my lady), he warns her; both the poet and his beloved will lie dead all too soon, and so, he concludes with lover’s logic: “Pour-ce aimez moy, ce pendant qu’estes belle” (So love me now, while you are still beautiful).

The refusal of the love object to comply with the wishes of the lover assures immortality in the poetry of Louise Labé as well. In her sonnets, Labé scolds her beloved for his absences and his infidelity; she remembers the happiness of the past, “l’heur passé”<sup>48</sup> that she spent with her beloved, and she recalls with sadness how he praised her beauty:

Las! que me sert, que si parfaitement  
 Louas jadis ma tresse doree,  
 Et de mes yeus la beauté comparee  
 A deus Soleils, . . . (sonnet 23, 216)

[What good is it how well, alas, you sang  
 those long-ago praises to my rich gold hair,  
 or told me that my gorgeous eyes compared  
 to suns . . . ]<sup>49</sup>

She also imagines a happy future, as in her very famous 18<sup>th</sup> sonnet: “Baise m’encor, rebaïse moy et baise” (206; “Kiss me again, rekiss me, and then kiss / me again” 207). However, Labé’s writes her poems precisely because her beloved has left her, because he is not there to kiss her, to caress her, to love her. As she explains in the dedicatory letter of her works:

“[Q]uand il avient que mettons par escrit nos concepçions, combien que puis apres notre cerveau coure par une infinité d’affaires et incessamment remue, si est ce que long tems apres, reprenans nos escrits, nous revenons au mesme point, et à la mesme dispoçion ou nous estions. Lors nous redouble notre aise: car nous retrouvons le plaisir passé qu’avons ù. . . ” (44)

[“[W]hen we happen to put our thoughts down in writing—even though afterward our mind races through endless distractions and never stops moving—by going back much later to what we wrote, we can still recapture the moment and state of mind we were in before. Then we experience twice the enjoyment, for we rediscover the pleasure we had in the past . . . ” 45]

<sup>48</sup> Louise Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, ed. Deborah Lesko Baker, trans. Deborah Lesko Baker and Annie Finch (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), sonnet 14, 198. Labé published a volume of her complete works in 1555.

<sup>49</sup> Unless otherwise noted, translations of Louis Labé’s poems are from Louise Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose*; here 217.

Labé writes to relive the pleasure of the past because her beloved is *gone*. Indeed, she finds it impossible to write of any present happiness, she cannot write about anything but her lover's absence. She characterizes her poetry as a lute in sonnet 12, "Lut, compagnon de ma calamité" ("Lute, my companion in calamity")<sup>50</sup> a lute that will play only *sad* songs: "Que commençant quelque son delectable, / Tu le rendois tout soudein lamentable" ("Now if a delicious sound starts to arise, you turn it back to a sad lament"). Her lover's absence, therefore, keeps him alive in her poetry, on her pages, in her book, which she had in fact published during her lifetime, thereby assuring herself a readership. She thus guaranteed that her memory of him, her imaginings of him, would live on. His absence renders him immortal. Had he returned, her poetically expressed longing would end, his existence as an immortal object, eternally desired, would cease.

Such attention to immortality is not limited to poetry. It can also be observed in the tales of Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*. Her storytellers, or *devisants*, also seem to be trying to manipulate their listeners and, by extension, her readers, with a promise of immortality or a threat of infamy. At the end of novella 26, the story of the young lord d'Avannes and the woman who dies from excessive virtue and insufficient sex, the narrator of this tale describes the moment of the heroine's death: "avecq ung doux soupir [elle rendit] sa glorieuse ame à Celluy dont elle estoit venue," (219; "with a gentle sigh she rendered her glorious soul unto Him from whom she had come," 303) and calls her demise "[une] mort glorieuse et louable" (219; "a glorious death that we should all admire," 304). In characterizing both the woman's soul and her death as "glorious," the narrator suggests her immortality, both in the next life, that which will be lived by her "glorious soul," and in this life as well: we should all admire her virtuous death, her decision to remain chaste, to deny herself a lover's relationship with d'Avannes although she knows it will kill her. The narrator offers his listeners the choice of an immaculate and immortal reputation which would follow a death that is pure and *glorieuse*, or, for the sinner: "renommée honteuse et infame, qui fait sa vie trop longue" (220; "disgrace, shame and a life that was all too long," 304). He threatens his listeners with *living* rather than with dying.

The choice offered to the reader/listener of Marguerite de Navarre's novella 26 appears to be between a shameful life and an honorable death, a "good" death. But, as we noted earlier, beginning in the Renaissance, living in infamy is sometimes confounded with dying in ecstasy,<sup>51</sup> and the same choice might be

<sup>50</sup> Labé, *Complete Poetry and Prose* (sonnet 12, 194–95).

<sup>51</sup> See Richard Regosin, "Death's Desire: Sensuality and Spirituality in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," *Modern Language Notes* 116, 4 (2001): 770–94, for a fascinating analysis of novella 9 of *L'Heptaméron*, "La parfaite amour qu'un gentil homme portoit à une damoysele, par estre trop celée et meconnue, le mena à la mort, au grand regret de s'amyne" (*L'Heptaméron*, 49–54) ("A

viewed in terms of a “good” death versus a splendid one, for Bataille’s *petite mort*, his small death, is a sublime death. This mingling of life, death, and eroticism is nowhere more evident than in Louise Labé’s sonnet 13:

Oh si j’estois en ce beau sein ravie  
De celui là pour lequel vois mourant:  
Si avec lui vivre le demeurant  
De mes cours jours ne m’empeschoit envie:

Si m’acollant me disoit, chere Amie,  
Contentons nous l’un l’autre, s’assurant  
Que ja tempeste, Euripe, ne Courant  
Ne nous pourra desjoindre en notre vie:

Si de mes bras la tenant acollé,  
Comme du Lierre est l’arbre encerclé,  
La mort venoit, de mon aise envieuse:

Lors que souef plus il me baiseroit,  
Et mon esprit sur ses levres fueroit,  
Bien je mourrois, plus que vivante, heureuse. (196)

[Oh, if I were taken to that handsome breast  
and ravished by him for whom I seem to die,  
if I could live with him through all of my  
short days, free of the envy of the rest;

if, clinging to me, he’d say, “We’re so blessed,  
dear love; let’s be contented just to lie  
together, proving to flood and stormy sky  
how life can never break our close caress” —

if I could tighten my arms around him, cling  
as ivy surrounds a tree with its circling,  
then death would be welcome to envy and destroy.

And if then he’d give me another thirsty kiss  
till my spirit flew away through his sweet lips,  
I would die instead of live, and with more joy. (197)]

The narrator declares that she appears to be dying for her beloved, yet she wishes to live with him for the rest of her life, locked in a passionate embrace. That embrace cannot be broken by storm or flood — clinging together they will survive. But if he should kiss her she would die happy, for that ecstatic, erotic, fateful, and fatal kiss would steal her spirit, her life. Knowing his kiss is deadly she longs for

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gentleman’s perfect love for his lady is so closely guarded that it leads him to his death, to the great grief of his beloved” [*The Heptameron*, 115–21]).

it still, craves it all the more, for the erotic death she imagines is rapturous, happier than the life she is living, sweeter even than the life she suggests, spent in passionate embrace with the man she desires. She will die in his arms, but she will die in ecstasy.

Pierre de Ronsard, faced with the death of his beloved Marie, also eroticizes death in his sonnet IV of his *Second Livre des Amours*:

Comme on voit sur la branche au mois de May la rose  
En sa belle jeunesse, en sa premiere fleur,  
Rendre le ciel jaloux de sa vive couleur,  
Quand l'Aube de ses pleurs au point du jour l'arrose:

La grace dans sa feuille, et l'amour se repose,  
Embaumant les jardins et les arbres d'odeur:  
Mais batue ou de pluie, ou d'excessive ardeur,  
Languissante elle meurt, feuille à feuille declose.

Ainsi en ta premiere et jeune nouveauté,  
Quand la terre et le ciel honoraient ta beauté,  
La Parque t'a tuee, et cendre tu reposes.

Pour obseques reçois mes larmes et mes pleurs,  
Ce vase pleine de lait, ce panier plein de fleurs,  
Afin que vif et mort ton corps ne soit que roses. (251–52)

[Just as, upon the branch, one sees the rose's  
Bud bloom in May, young blossom newly spread  
Before the sky, jealous of its bright red,  
As Dawn, sprinkling her tears, the morn discloses:

Beauty lies in its leaf, and love reposes,  
Wafting its scent on tree, bush, flowerbed:  
But, lashed by rain or torrid heat, soon dead,  
Leaf after leaf its fragile grace exposes.

So too, blooming with youth, as earth and heaven  
Honored your beauty, to Fate was it given  
To slay your flesh, which now in ash reposes.

Take thus these tears that I, in tribute, shed,  
This jug of milk, these blossoms heaped, outspread,  
So that in death, as life, that flesh be roses.]<sup>52</sup>

His description of his muse's beauty as a rose, and as a "première fleur," is common enough in the poetry of the era, and not suggestive of death. But this rosebud is "batue," and here Ronsard exploits the multiple senses of the verb

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<sup>52</sup> Translation from *Lyrics of the French Renaissance*, 289.

"battre." She is beaten by rain, or perhaps she is vanquished by excessive passion, by "excessive ardeur." Even the manner in which she dies, *languissant*, can be read in two ways: it might imply illness, but more commonly in Renaissance love poetry "languissant" suggests love-sickness.<sup>53</sup> Like Des Périers's superstitious doctor, Brantôme's unfortunate husbands, and Marguerite de Navarre's pining lovers, it seems that this young lady, in her *belle jeunesse*, may well have died of love. But she is beautiful in death, still desirable, still desired by the poet, for he comes to her with a basket of flowers, which represent, and are meant to preserve, Marie's beauty and youth. And he brings her a "vase plein de lait", a flask full of milk; because of its nourishing qualities, this milk might symbolize life, for Ronsard promises Marie that in death as well as life her body will remain "roses." Or perhaps this white liquid, brought by a man to an eternally young and beautiful woman, perpetually in repose, represents quite another source of life. Death is as sexy as sex is deadly.

## Conclusion

The distinction between sex and death is blurred in early modern French literature. Death is eroticized and sex kills. Mostly sex kills men, especially sex with a widow, but it seems that almost any wife might kill her husband because women have a stronger, and in fact uncontrollable sex drive that could mortally exhaust their poor husbands. In fact, as it turns out, any man is in danger of being killed by excessive sex, even one who is young, healthy, and single.

Women were not so much in danger of dying as a result of the sex act itself. They were more at risk should they be found out, and the risk was that they might be murdered by an angry husband. Some women, though, died while trying to protect themselves from unwanted sex, which is to say rape, and their efforts to defend their chastity brought them the reward of a gloriously virtuous reputation, of immortality.

It is not just sex that kills: abstinence proved equally deadly in early modern French literature, whether it was abstention due to inordinate self-control, or lack of sex due to unrequited love.

Refusal of sex could earn immortality for the beloved. In the case of the oft-portrayed Biblical heroine Judith, this immortality was the result of admiration for her chastity along with her other virtues. For the most part, however, immortality

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and Its Commentaries*. Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), xii–xiii, notes that the manifestations of lovesickness include "idealization of the love object, preoccupation, depression, insomnia, erratic moods, and social withdrawal."

due to refusal of sex was inspired by the poet's undying desire to possess that which he or she was denied endlessly. Unremitting denial inspired continued writing of poems, leading to everlasting renown as the perfect, distant, unattainable love object. And those pining early modern poets achieved immortality for themselves and for the objects of their desire by recording eloquently, passionately, and permanently, that desire.





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## From the Clitoris to the Breast: The Eclipse of the Female Libido in Early Modern Art, Literature, and Philosophy

As an undergraduate taking a course in eighteenth-century English literature I remember wondering how it was possible to go from the terrifying description of libidinous, castrating witches in sixteenth and seventeenth century witchcraft treatises to the mawkish sentimentality of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie*? What happened to the rakish heroines of Restoration drama, and how were the feisty heroines in Aphra Behn's comedies of love and intrigue transmogrified into those bloodless "angels in the house" so celebrated by Coventry Patmore?<sup>1</sup> And what killed off characters like Moll Flanders, whose view of motherhood was casual in the extreme, only to replace her with Grueze's "*La Mère bien aimée*" (The Beloved Mother), one of the most popular pictures at the Salon of 1765?<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1.) As Diderot commented, this picture is "dramatic poetry" that invites "us" — meaning husbands — to action, the action of giving one's wife "as many children as you can."<sup>3</sup>

Why, in short, did discussions of the irrepressible and dangerous female libido so common in ancient, medieval, and early modern literature, art, and medical and scientific treatises give way to sentimental homilies about the marvels of motherhood and paeans to the female breast?<sup>4</sup> And, furthermore, what effect did this have on the actual lives of women?

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<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, Books 1 & 2 (London: Haggerston Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Grueze exhibited a sketch of "The Beloved Mother" at the Salon in 1765. This sketch, which is now lost, provided the basis for Grueze's subsequent painting of the scene. An engraving of this painting (Fig. 1) was later produced by Jean Massard and published in 1775.

<sup>3</sup> Denis Diderot, *Salons*, ed. Jean Seznec and J. Adhémar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I, 233, II, 155. Cited in Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art," *The Art Bulletin* 55 (1973): 570–83; here 570.

<sup>4</sup> On the dangers of female libido, see Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus & the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1994); eadem, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

It is the purpose of this paper to show how attitudes toward male and female sexuality changed during the so-called "long eighteenth century" (1660–1800) as a new form of essentialism came to define the sexes, restricting women to the domestic realm more closely than ever before. As many scholars have pointed out, the definition of women in terms of marriage and motherhood was more than a domestic matter, for it reflected social, political, and economic developments in the world at large. Capitalism, nationalism, and colonialism all contributed to eclipse the female libido as the breast took precedence over the clitoris and nursing over orgasms.<sup>5</sup>

During the eighteenth century the idea first arose that the true wealth of nations lay in its population.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the female reproductive body was in effect colonized for the good of the Mother Country. Just like agricultural land, mothers were enclosed, and motherhood was conceptualized in terms of increased production and equated with the capitalization of agriculture and the industrialization of manufactures.<sup>7</sup> John Wesley aptly commented that describing childbirth in terms of "reproduction" rather than "generation," as it had traditionally been called, turned women into productive units much like "beasts" as well as "nettles or onions."<sup>8</sup> In so far as scientists and medical practitioners collaborated in this transformation of women from sexual beings to mothers writ large, this essay provides one more example of how the scientific ideas of every era inevitably reflect larger social realities.<sup>9</sup>

Two last points need to be made. First, the ideology of motherhood that developed from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries was class specific, applying solely to the minority of women in the middle and upper classes who had the income and leisure not to work. And second, it was a prescriptive ideology that masked the very real fear of female sexuality and the contempt for women and motherhood that appears in much of the fiction, art, medical, scientific, and philosophical writing of the period.<sup>10</sup> For all the rhetoric glorifying motherhood

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<sup>5</sup> For an insightful study of female libido, or desire, in the twelfth century, see the contribution to this volume by Juanita Ruys.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20–21.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2 (February 1992): 204–35; rpt. in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 16 (1992): 185–213.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Cody, *Birthing the Nation*, 20–21.

<sup>9</sup> Helen E. Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> As we have learned from Peter Gay among others, for all the talk about the sexless angels in nineteenth century households, passionate, orgasmic sex for both males and females did not vanish. Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

and praising “angelic” wives, the old image of the libidinous, castrating witch lingered on like a dark shadow dogging the new “Cult of Womanhood.” As to the question of whether or not the ideology of motherhood was good or bad for women, scholars profoundly disagree, as we shall see.

In view of our society’s penchant for demonizing certain women as “bad mothers,” it may be hard to believe that judging women in terms of their maternal and nurturing qualities is a relatively modern phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> A women’s status did not depend on her reputation as a good or bad mother. In fact, before the eighteenth century mothers were pretty much left out of literary works and even autobiographies.<sup>12</sup> Louis Montrose comments on the absence of mothers in Shakespeare, and one would hardly know from reading the autobiographies of Richard Baxter and John Locke that they were “of woman born.”<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Goldberg notes their absence from Stuart family portraits as well.<sup>14</sup> The existence of such a thing as a “maternal instinct” was flatly denied by Locke on the same grounds that he rejected the notion of innate moral laws of any kind. As he says in his *Essay on Human Understanding*:

If any [rule] can be thought to be naturally imprinted, none, I think, can have a fairer Pretence to be innate, than this; *Parents preserve and cherish your children*. When therefore you say, That this is an innate Rule, What do you mean? . . . [For we do not need to] seek so far as *Mingrelia* or *Peru*, to find instances of such as neglect, abuse, nay and destroy their children; or look on it only as the more than Brutality of some savage and barbarous Nations, when we remember, that it was a familiar, and uncondemned Practice amongst the Greeks and Romans, to expose, without pity or remorse, their innocent Infants.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ruth H. Bloch, “American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785–1815,” *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 2 (June, 1978): 100–26: “. . . in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century literature written and read in America, motherhood was singularly unidealized, usually disregarded as a subject, and even at times actually denigrated” (100). The same held true for England. In the *Dunciad* (1728), for example, Alexander Pope described the mother and novelist Eliza Haywood (ca. 1693–1756): as being “With cow-like udders, and with ox-like eyes.” Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, ed. Valerie Rumbold (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 1999), Bk. 2, ii, l. 164.

<sup>12</sup> For remarkable exceptions in the case of Marie de France’s twelfth-century *lais*, see the contribution to this volume by Molly Robinson Kelly.

<sup>13</sup> Louis Montrose, “A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream and the Shaping of Elizabethan Culture: Gender, Power, Form,” *Rewriting the Renaissance; The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan & Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986); Levin L. Schücking, *The Puritan Family: A Social Study from the Literary Sources*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 85ff.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, “Fatherly Authority: The Politics of Stuart Family Images,” *Rewriting the Renaissance*, 3–32.

<sup>15</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1979, Bk I, iii, 73–74.

The idea that females were innately “motherly” and “nurturing” — in a word, “doting” — on either an individual or cosmic level was not an assumption in the medieval or early modern periods. This is not to deny that parents in every period loved their children, instead it is simply to say that before the eighteenth century mother love was not singled out as one of the most important defining characteristic of women.<sup>16</sup> As Katharine Park has shown, in the medieval period there was nothing particularly nurturing about female “Natura.” She creates in an androgynous manner by engaging in activities generally associated with males such as speaking, molding, carving, or forging.<sup>17</sup> In the Renaissance nature appears in a new guise as a lactating or many breasted woman. This depiction might appear to move closer to the ideal of the “doting” mother, but, as Park argues, such a depiction had its roots in late-medieval tropes of princely generosity and, in any case, encapsulated the idea that nature was a purely creative force, indifferent to the subsequent well-being of her individual creations.<sup>18</sup>

The Renaissance and early modern emphasis on the fertility of nature rather than her nurturing qualities is reflected in contemporary literature which emphasizes female sexuality rather than maternity. Although Thomas Lacquer has been criticized for ignoring historical complexity as well as chronology, his claim that medical opinion moved from what has been called a “one sex model” to a “two sex model” in the course of the eighteenth century has merit.<sup>19</sup> According to the “one sex model,” males and females were viewed as existing on a continuum with males on the high end and women on the low.<sup>20</sup> This continuum was

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<sup>16</sup> On the existence of parental love in the medieval and early modern period, see *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The Results of a Paradigm Shift in the History of Mentality*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005). There are actually many new studies on motherhood in the Middle Ages, see, for instance, Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), but this may be evidence of a modern preoccupation more than a medieval one.

<sup>17</sup> Katharine Park, “Nature in Person: Medieval and Renaissance Allegories and Emblems,” *The Moral Authority of Nature*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 50–73; here 54.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Cf. Andreas Goesch, *Diana Ephesia: Ikonographische Studien zur Allegorie der Natur in der Kunst vom 16.–19. Jahrhundert*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXVIII: Kunstgeschichte, 253 (Frankfurt a. M. and New York: Peter Lang, 1996); James I of England applied the image of a lactating mother to himself as an indication of his generosity to his subjects. He described himself as “a loving nourish-father,” who provided his subjects with “their own nourish-milk.” See Stephen Orgel, “Prospero’s Wife,” *Rewriting the Renaissance*, 50–64.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). For critiques of Lacquer, see Michael Stolberg, “A Woman Down to Her Bones: The Anatomy of Sexual Difference in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” *Isis* 94 (2003): 274–99; Katherine Park and Robert A. Nye, “Destiny is Anatomy,” *New Republic* 204 (1991): 53–57.

<sup>20</sup> According to the one sex model, gender was by its very nature unstable, which made any sign of

reflected in male and female genitalia, which were conceptualized as being mirror images of each other. This was Vesalius's view. As his student Baldasar Heseler wrote: "Galen says that the organs of procreation are the same in the male and in the female, only that in the female all is reversed to the male, in whom that which is inside in the female is outside. And again in the male all is contrary to the female. For if you turn the scrotum, the testicles and the penis inside ut you will also have all the genital organs of the female, like they are in the male."<sup>21</sup> The "one sex model" reflected traditional pre-Copernican ways of organizing experience in terms of a vertical hierarchy of interlocking rungs—the "Great Chain of Being," so famously described by Arthur Lovejoy—in which every rung shared the same qualities but differed in terms of quality and quantity.<sup>22</sup>

Thus women were like men, only less so. The Galenic assumption that both sexes had to achieve orgasm to produce the semen necessary for conception was characteristic of this "one sex model," in which sexual pleasure was deemed essential for both partners. The "one sex model" was not, however, the only model available before the eighteenth century, as Lacquer mistakenly contends. Aristotle provided an alternative "two sex model" based on his conviction that women were incapable of producing semen. Consequently, neither sexual pleasure nor orgasm were essential for females to conceive. In defense of Lacquer, however, it should be pointed out that one of the most popular sex manuals in the early modern period was titled *Aristotle's Master-Piece: Or, the Secrets of Generation Displayed in All the Parts Thereof. . . : Very Necessary for all Midwives, Nurses and Young-Married*, even though it espoused the Galenic "one sex model."<sup>23</sup> This work, which was revised and reprinted in many versions, insisted on the necessity of female orgasm for conception and argued that orgasm was facilitated by clitoral stimulation.

In *The Midwives Book, Or the Whole Art of Midwifery* (1671), Mrs. Jane Sharp endorsed the one sex model and claimed that without clitoral stimulation a woman could not become pregnant: ". . . this Clitoris . . . makes a woman lustfull and take delight in copulation, and were it not for this they would have no desire nor delight, nor would they ever conceive."<sup>24</sup> The essential connection between

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effeminacy in men all the more troubling. One reason why Puritans were so against the theater was because of the fact that men played women's parts. This was plainly asking for trouble. Laura Levine, "Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-Theatricality and Effeminization from 1579–1642," *Criticism* 28 (Spring 1986): 121–43.

<sup>21</sup> Baldasar Heseler, *Andreas Versalius' First Public Anatomy at Bologna 1540: An Eyewitness Report*, ed. and trans. Ruben Eriksson (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1959), 181.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur J. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: The History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

<sup>23</sup> This work went through at least sixty-seven editions between 1684 and 1794. Here cited after the London edition (London: T.B., 1699).

<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book. Or the Whole Art of Midwifery Discovered* (London: S. Miller, 1671), 43–44.

female sexual pleasure and conception appears in other standard works as well. For example, in *The Complete Midwife's Practice Enlarged* (1680) the author claims that a woman first "apprehends" she is pregnant "if after she hath had the company of her Husband, she hath received more content than ordinary."<sup>25</sup>

During the eighteenth century, however, the clitoris was increasingly left out of the sexual picture as the "one sex model" was eclipsed by the "two sex model," and females orgasms were deemed unnecessary for conception. "Women," as Felicity Nussbaum, says "become the object of impregnation rather than participants in reproduction."<sup>26</sup> Not only were women's genitals now thought to be of an entirely different nature than those of men, but the entire anatomy of the two sexes was incommensurate because each bone, sinew, muscle, blood vessel, and organ was itself gendered. John Barclay's *Anatomy of the Bones of the Human Body* (Edinburgh, 1829) illustrates the gendered nature of male and female skeletons.<sup>27</sup> From the large size of the pelvis, the narrow shoulders, and the small head in Fig. 2 it would have been obvious to Barclay's contemporaries that this depicts a female.

As Londa Schiebinger has pointed out, however, Barclay distorted his drawing to emphasize what he wanted and expected to see, namely, confirmation of women's primary and divinely ordained function as bearers of children.<sup>28</sup> The emphasis on the female pelvic areas at the expense of the female brain is underlined by the ostrich in the background—a "bird brain" if there ever was one—placed there, one can only surmise, to reinforce contemporary theories about the innate intellectual inferiority of women. Barclay's illustration of a male skeleton sends a very different message (Fig. 3). Note the much larger head, smaller pelvis, and the proud and powerful horse. And observe the house in the background. The implication here is that not only are males kings of their respective castles, but they produce the culture that constructs these castles.

Even in the face of Barclay's skeletons, a number of historians reject the idea that the difference between the sexes was increasingly emphasized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Instead they argue that the idea of sexual difference actually collapsed under pressure from the new cult of sensibility and the "feminization" of discourse and behavior this entailed.<sup>29</sup> The allowance given to

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Cody, *Birthing the Nation*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Felicity A. Nussbaum, "'Savage' Mothers: Narratives of Maternity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991–1992): 123–51; here 128.

<sup>27</sup> Londa Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth Century Anatomy," *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 42–82.

<sup>28</sup> Schiebinger, "Skeletons in the Closet."

<sup>29</sup> Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); Madeleine

the “man of feeling” to display his most tender emotions within domestic walls as well as without has led these scholars to question the generally accepted idea that “separate spheres” for men and women became the norm.<sup>30</sup> Instead of being a sanctuary for women, they contend that the household became a place where men and women began to socialize in ways they never had in the past, a place where husbands and wives ate, conversed, and read together, and where both parents took on the responsibilities of caring for children. In this atmosphere, an entirely new discourse arose between the sexes that emphasized their commonality. In this revisionist history the increasing prominence of male midwives is seen as a sign of the growing awareness that men shared fundamental human traits with women and could empathize with their physical and emotional experiences.

While there is much to be said for this revisionist view, I would argue that the very developments encouraging historians to claim that sexual difference collapsed led to new strategies to bolster sexual difference. The prominence of male midwives offers a case in point. Their existence was not universally applauded because they seemed to undermine clear-cut distinctions between the sexes. But even those who celebrated male midwives did not do so on the grounds that men and women were alike, but on the grounds that they were fundamentally different. Men might well share the same emotions and feelings as women, but their intellect and knowledge made them both different and vastly superior, and it was precisely this mental superiority that entitled them to tell women exactly what to do when it came to bearing and rearing children. This point was made in no uncertain terms by the physician William Cadogan (1711–1797) in *An Essay upon Nursing, and the Management of Children, From Their Birth to Three Years of Age* (1748):

It is with great Pleasure I see at last the Preservation of children become the care of Men of Sense. In my Opinion, this business has been too long fatally left to the

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Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*. Vol. 1: *Heterosexuality and the Third Sex in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Amanda J. Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres: A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” *History Journal* 36 (1993): 383–414; Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650–1850. The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London: Longman, 1998). Newer scholarship emphasizes the separation of the sexes in the medieval and early modern periods: Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 257–79; Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); David Cressy, “Gender Trouble and Cross Dressing in Early Modern England,” *Journal of British Studies* 35 (1996): 438–65.



Management of Women who cannot be supposed to have proper knowledge to fit them for such a Task, notwithstanding they look upon it to be their own Province.

Cadogan was convinced that once they had read his book, "most Nurses, Aunts, Grand-Mothers, etc." would realize "how much they have hitherto been in the wrong."<sup>31</sup> Rousseau's Julie has no trouble in accepting the view that men know more about raising children than women. As she says: "I nurse children, but I am not presumptuous enough to wish to train men. More worthy hands will be charged with this noble task. I am a woman and a Mother and I know how to keep my proper sphere."<sup>32</sup> As female midwives were replaced by male physicians, books written by male experts on every aspect of infant and child care proliferated.<sup>33</sup> As Bloch says, referring to Cadogan among others, "A few British physicians openly deplored the superstitious ignorance of most mothers and believed themselves to be on a mission of scientific enlightenment."<sup>34</sup> Thus, however much male authority and the patriarchal structure of the family may have changed as a result of political and economic developments or changes in taste and feeling, men did not cease to claim they were the authoritative and rational head of the family.<sup>35</sup> The only difference was that men could now claim to be authorities when it came to emotions as well as reason. Cody emphasizes this point:

... the leading men-midwives were happy to dispense advice not only to mothers, but also to men about their domestic roles. Like men-midwives, ideal eighteenth-century fathers were naturally authoritative and rational as they had been for centuries as the paterfamilias, but also compassionate for wives and children, paternal and loving, so emotional that they could be as quickly moved to tears as were women.<sup>36</sup>

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions of homosexuality and hermaphroditism provide further evidence that the distinction between the sexes became more extreme in prescriptive literature even as this distinction was undermined by the actual lives of men and women. Henry Fielding's *The Female Husband*, which he published anonymously in 1746, was a fictionalized and

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the Breast," 199.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Duncan, "Happy Mothers," 582.

<sup>33</sup> For some representative titles, see Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition," 123, n 34.

<sup>34</sup> Block, "American Feminine Ideals," 111–12.

<sup>35</sup> Michael McKeon discusses what he describes as the "foundering of patriarchal authority" that began in the late seventeenth century as the growing middle class rejected the aristocratic ideology that family interest were identified with the male head of the family as well as the idea that honor and property must be transmitted through primogeniture and restricted to males. But older ideas of patriarchy gave way to newer ones. See McKeon's article "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660–1760," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (Spring, 1995): 295–322.

<sup>36</sup> Cody, *Birthing the Nation*, 14.

satirical account of the life of the female transvestite Mary Hamilton, who dressed as a man and assumed the sexual role of a husband. As Marjorie Garber and Terry Castle have argued, transvestism, along with homosexuality, became topics of considerable cultural anxiety because they blurred the distinction between the sexes.<sup>37</sup> As the *Universal Spectator* declared (December 14, 1728), "Decency requires that the sexes should be differenc'd by Dress, in order to prevent multitudes of Irregularities which otherwise would continually be occasion'd." In his poem *The Masquerade*, Fielding makes it clear exactly what sort of "irregularity" would result from tolerating transvestism and homosexuality: nothing short of the end of male dominance and female subordination. In the poem he refers to those "litttle apish butterflies," by which he means effeminate, cross-dressing men, and comments:

And if the breed been't quickly mended,  
Your [meaning men's] empire shortly will be ended:  
Breeches our brawny thighs shall grace, . . .  
For when men women turn—why then  
May women not be chang'd to men?<sup>38</sup>

Like transvestism and homosexuality, hermaphroditism became another push-button issue in the eighteenth century. As Felicity Nussbaum argues, clarifying sexual difference was an eighteenth-century preoccupation and required eradicating any ambiguity between the sexes. People were encouraged to think that there were two sexes and only two, and the definition of what was male and what female was centered on the clear and obvious difference between male and female generative organs.<sup>39</sup>

Part of the attempt to make the definition of male and female a matter of either/or involved declaring hermaphroditism a hoax, as the physician James Parson did in his treatise *A Mechanical and Critical Enquiry into the Nature of Hermaphrodites* (London: J. Wathoe, 1741). There could be no middle ground between male and female; each was self contained and distinct. Transvestism, homosexuality, and hermaphroditism were hot topics in the eighteenth century because they threatened to reveal that social order was a human construct and not

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<sup>37</sup> Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 1992); Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York; Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> Fielding, *The Masquerade*, cited in Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 95.

<sup>39</sup> The struggle concerning how to identify sexual roles obviously harks as far back as the early Middle Ages, if not long before, probably because ambivalence and transgression in this regard seems to have been a constant factor in human history—see, for example, the contribution to this volume by Asa Simon Mittman and Susan M. Kim. I am simply arguing in this essay that the issue of sexual identity became especially problematic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the reasons I outline.

the product of a "natural" and divinely ordained plan. To defend against this unsettling possibility, new "natural" barriers were erected between the sexes, and this brings us back to Barclay's skeletons.

As Ludmilla Jordanova has pointed out, scientific thinking has a deeper kinship with the humanities than is generally recognized inasmuch as scientific discourses and scientific illustrations are never simple depictions or representations of an actual state of affairs. In their use of rhetoric and verbal and visual devices, scientific texts are representative of prevailing world views.<sup>40</sup> Barclay's skeletons illustrate this point. We can discern the same effects of ideology in other purportedly objective medical works as well. For not only were skeletons of men and women increasingly gendered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so too was the whole of human anatomy. The nervous system, for example, was feminized, while the musculature was declared masculine.<sup>41</sup> Jordanova provides an insightful discussion of how male and female wax models, which became popular teaching devices, illustrate the prevailing ideology of gender. Female wax models are notable for their realism. They present the female body often lying on a velvet cushion with flowing hair, pearl necklaces, eyelashes, eyebrows, and flesh realistically painted to look "alive." All these devices reinforce the idea that the viewer is simply seeing an independently existing reality. These female models are completely covered with flesh, but removable parts allow one to penetrate into the internal organs and even uncover small fetuses. According to Jordanova, male wax models are much less realistic; she claims she has yet to see one in either a recumbent position or completely covered with flesh. Clearly there is more than meets the eye in these very different presentations of male and female anatomy. They reflected the polarized view of the sexes that dominated contemporary medical discourse, providing the basis for the kind of sexist observations made by the physician and philosophical writer Pierre Jean George Cabanis (1757–1808). For Cabanis it was an established "fact" that women had "feeble" muscles, and this fact provided the key to understanding female nature and character:

This muscular feebleness inspires in women an instinctive disgust of strenuous exercise; it draws them toward amusements and sedentary occupations. One could add that the separation of their hips makes walking more painful for women . . . . This habitual feeling of weakness inspires less confidence . . . and as a woman finds herself less able to exist on her own, the more she needs to attract the attention of others, to strengthen herself using those around her whom she judges most capable of protecting her.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 58.

<sup>42</sup> *Oeuvres philosophiques*, vol. 1, 278, cited in Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 28.

The “muscular feebleness” of women excited a similar series of sexist observations from the physician James Barry (1741–1806), who emphasized what he perceived to be the defining characteristic of females, namely their “softness.” Like Cabanis’s observations, those by Barry astonish us because of their utter irrelevance to the vast majority of women with whom Barry must have interacted on a daily basis. But apparently oblivious to the milk maids, fish wives, domestic servants, shop keepers, and farm workers who made his upper middle class life possible, Barry claims that:

The whole and every part of the male form, generally taken, indicates an aptness and propensity to action, vigorous exertion, and power. In the female form the appearance is very different; it gives the idea of something rather passive than active, and seems created not so much for the purposes of laborious utility, as for the exercise of all the softer, milder qualities. How admirably does this gentleness of frame correspond with the mild and tender pursuits for which female nature was intended . . . Hence it appears that this superior tenderness and soft affecting sensibility . . . are only the legible, agreeable exteriors of necessary utility.<sup>43</sup>

And here we arrive at a crucial point and a crucial word, namely “utility;” for the softness of the female body emphasized by Barry was epitomized in the female breast, and the breast was the very mark of female “utility.”

“Utility” and “fitness” become key concepts in the Enlightenment, joining together notions of morality, aesthetics, as well as economic efficiency. As we can see from David Hume’s essay entitled “Why Utility Pleases,” what was useful was synonymous with what was both good and beautiful.<sup>44</sup> As far as women were concerned, the good, the beautiful, and the useful were now localized in the female breast.<sup>45</sup> Lorraine Daston points out that there was a fascination with part-whole relationships in the eighteenth century, a relationship summed up in the word “economy.” Breaking things down into parts and reassembling them as in Adam’s Smith’s famous description of pin-making was as much a part of political economy as it was of science and medicine: “In both political economy and natural history, observers analyzed objects into interlocking parts and traced the fit of form to function with an eagle eye for ‘fitness.’”<sup>46</sup>

Female breasts were of particular interest to medical practitioners concerned with philosophy and ethics. For breasts symbolized the “fitness” and “utility” of

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<sup>43</sup> Jordanova, *Sexual Visions*, 60.

<sup>44</sup> Lorraine Daston, “Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment,” *The Moral Authority of Nature*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 100–26; here 101, 123.

<sup>45</sup> Valerie A. Fildes, *Breasts, Bottles, and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> Daston, “Attention and the Values of Nature in the Enlightenment,” 120.

women's role in the family and defined women in terms of their ability to bear and suckle infants. The close link between medical, social, and aesthetic values is apparent in the many paeans to breasts in the literature of the period. Women's special charms now lay above rather than below the waist. As Hugh Smith, an English physician whose works were extremely popular, intoned:

O! that I could prevail upon my fair countrywomen to become still more lovely in the sight of men! Believe it not, when it is insinuated, that your bosoms are less charming, for having a dear little cherub at your breast.<sup>47</sup>

Since nursing mothers were described as being healthy, radiant, graceful, and "harmonious,"<sup>48</sup> it is no wonder their husbands found them attractive. As Smith says, "a chaste and tender wife, with a little one at her breast is certainly to her husband the most exquisitely enchanting object upon earth."<sup>49</sup> Even Lovelace, the despicable cad and rapist in Richardson's *Clarissa*, is momentarily overcome by the thought of two little replicas of himself affixed to Clarissa's snowy bosom. As he exclaims to a friend:

Let me perish, Belford, if I would not forego the brightest diadem in the world for the pleasure of seeing a twin Lovelace at each charming breast, drawing from it his first sustenance. . . .<sup>50</sup>

Scholars like Nancy Armstrong and Lawrence Stone interpret the newly emerging emphasis on motherhood as a positive step for women. Randolph Trumbach goes as far as to describe breast-feeding and the movement to promote it as one of the finest consequences of the Enlightenment.<sup>51</sup> Others scholars take a more pessimistic view, however. As Henry Abelove has suggested, non-productive forms of sexuality were increasingly devalued in the late eighteenth century as a productive model based on heterosexual relations took over.<sup>52</sup> And this resulted in an emphasis on marriage and motherhood, both of which, in Ruth Perry's view, put further restraints on the freedom of women as they were ever more closely identified with and defined by their reproductive capacities.

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<sup>47</sup> Hugh Smith, *Letters to Married Women on the Nursing and Management of Children* (1792), cited in Perry, "Colonizing the Breast," 193.

<sup>48</sup> "The Advantage of Maternal Nurture," *The Weekly Visitor, or Ladies' Miscellany* II (May, 1804): 260–61.

<sup>49</sup> Hugh Smith, *Letters to Married Women*, cited in Perry, "Colonizing the Breast," 193.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>51</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: a Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977).

<sup>52</sup> Henry Abelove, "Some Speculations on the History of Sexual Intercourse During the Long Eighteenth Century in England," *Genders* 6 (1989): 125–30.

Sex and motherhood, or the clitoris and the breast, were now pitted against each other, and the breast took pride of place as medical literature treated women's bodies in terms of their maternal rather than sexual functions. Women were increasingly valued as "breeders" of the men necessary to stock the army and propel the nation to political and economic greatness.<sup>53</sup>

One of the most important, though often overlooked, developments in the early modern period was the increasing interest in the collection of statistics and their use in determining governmental policies dealing with taxation, conscription, the food supply, plague control, and other issues involving the health and well-being of citizens.<sup>54</sup> In France there was a widespread fear that the population was declining to the point of extinction, and this led to a flood of literature extolling motherhood and condemning the immorality and selfishness of those women who neither married nor bore children. As Diderot said in his description of the drawing with which this essay began, Greuze's *The Beloved Mother*, "[i]t preaches population. . . ."<sup>55</sup> Perry suggests that this growing fixation with motherhood, the breast, and breast-feeding on both sides of the channel and across Europe as a whole may account for the incidence of breast disease in novels written by women and indicate their resentment at the appropriation of female bodies for reproductive purposes.<sup>56</sup> While she agrees with Lawrence Stone that the new emphasis on motherhood may well have encouraged the ideal of a "companionate

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<sup>53</sup> The connection between nationalism, imperialism, and the idea that child-bearing mothers were an imperial resource is discussed by Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop* 5 (Spring 1978): 9–65. The concern with rates of population growth explains the increased interest in and funding of foundling hospitals. On this subject, see James Stephen Taylor, "Philanthropy and Empire: Jonas Hanway and the Infant Poor of London," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12 (1979): 285–305; Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>54</sup> Andrea A. Rusnock, *Vital Accounts: Quantifying Health and Population in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Peter Buck, "Seventeenth-Century Political Arithmetic: Civil Strife and Vital Statistics," *Isis* 86 (1977): 70–83; John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 97.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Duncan, "Happy Mothers," 582.

<sup>56</sup> Perry, "The Colonization of the Breast": "If Richardson and scenes involving breast-feeding in his successive novels illustrate the cultural appropriation of women's bodies for reproductive purposes, then the novels of Frances Sheridan and Maria Edgeworth dramatize women's resentment at this new colonization of their bodies. The scenes and images of breast disease in their novels may express how women felt victimized by their female bodies and by their new dependence on superior male medical knowledge of these bodies. These fictional representations are the other side of the new reverence for motherhood, record of a growing feeling among women that they no longer controlled their own physiological processes, no longer believed in their shared medical and herbal knowledge, no longer expected to exercise independent judgment about how to deploy their bodies" (207).

marriage," she argues that this new model of marriage served male rather than female interests:

Educating women to be more interesting companions for men rather than as individuals with their own economic or intellectual purposes is an ambiguous advance, not one that moves very far along the path toward equality . . . This re-appropriation of female subjectivity for the sake of a new cultural discourse, which separates public from private, political from personal, and market relations from domestic relations, was a colonization of women far more thoroughgoing than any that had preceded it.<sup>57</sup>

Lisa Forman Cody takes Perry's argument a step further, suggesting that the female reproductive body became the focal point of even broader political and cultural claims about nationality, race, class, and sexual orientation:

. . . eighteenth-century Britons exploited a popular fascination with wondrous and weird tales of sex and birth to help demarcate difference, inferiority, exclusion, and unreason, all characteristics essential to building hierarchical configurations of individual and corporate identities.<sup>58</sup>

Scientists, doctors, missionaries, and ethnographers all contributed to an evaluation of the developmental differences between races, cultures, and ethnicities at home and across the globe on the basis of their sexual organs and sexual proclivities. Tales of outlandish reproductive customs, weird sexual beliefs, strange bodily practices, and abnormal bodily configurations were taken as symptomatic of alien cultures mired in ignorance, superstition, and perversion. The phenomenal interest in the so-called "Hottentot Venus" is a case in point.<sup>59</sup> Outsized genitals such as those of the Hottentot Venus signaled a licentious, libidinous lifestyle that contrasted "savage" women and "savage" mothers to the ideal of chastity and modesty summed up in "The Cult of Womanhood" and the new sentimentalized vision of motherhood.

Rachel Holmes documents the sad, short life of Saartjie Baartman, otherwise known as the "Hottentot Venus." Saartjie's meteoric rise to stardom was entirely due to the prurient interest of Europeans. Did she or did she not possess the legendary "Hottentot apron," a "pinafore of flesh" supposedly due to the "hypertrophy of the labia minora" and which concealed the *mons veneris*?<sup>60</sup> This question had mystified European travelers for years. In a diary entry for March 1771 Captain Cook noted that he would make use of his stop at Cape Town to

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<sup>57</sup> Perry, "The Colonization of the Breast," 192 and 193.

<sup>58</sup> Cody, *Birthing the Nation*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Rachel Holmes, *African Queen: The Real Life of the Hottentot Venus* (New York: Random House, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Holmes, *African Queen*, 86.

explore “the great question among natural historians, whether the women of this country have or have not that fleshy flap or apron which has been called the *Sinus Pudoris*.”<sup>61</sup> No satisfactory answer had been obtained by the time Baartman arrived in Paris some forty-six years later. For it was only in Paris and at the Jardin du Roi that a panel of zoologists, naturalists, anatomists, physiologists, artists, and draftsmen were assembled to investigate the matter and assess the evidence provided by Baartman herself under a triumvirate of the most famous natural scientists of the day, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (1772–1844), Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), and Henri de Blainville (1777–1850).

With the utmost coaxing Cuvier finally persuaded Baartman to remove the flesh colored body suit she wore at all her public appearances, but even then she insisted on covering her genitals with a handkerchief. The upshot of the three-day investigation by the assembled luminaries was that nothing whatsoever was learned about the existence or non-existence of the “apron.” This did nothing, however, to stop the fervid imagination of de Blainville. Like Barclay before him, de Blainville knew what had to be there, and he had his draftsman draw it. As Holmes comments, “Having never got behind the handkerchief, de Blainville simply invented fabulous, swinging pudenda in his feverish imagination” (Fig. 4).<sup>62</sup> Another engraving attributed to J. Pass (1800) exaggerates even further what never existed (Fig. 5).

The prurient interest in Baartman’s “swinging pudenda” resonates with what Thomas Laquer, following Renée Spitz, E. H. Hare, and Robert H. MacDonald, has described as the hysteria over masturbation that developed in the eighteenth century, becoming close to an obsession in the nineteenth.<sup>63</sup> The topic of masturbation galvanized the attention of eighteenth and nineteenth century educators, theologians, moralists, and physicians in a way it never had before. And while masturbation was an equal opportunity activity, it was considered especially worrisome when practiced by women because it took them away from the breast and back to the clitoris. Just as clitoral stimulation had been accepted as a legitimate, even necessary, part of heterosexual intercourse up to the end of the of the seventeenth century, so too had masturbation been medically sanctioned as a way to rid women of excess fluid.

Because women were naturally cold and could not burn off excess moisture in the way “hot” males could, Galen (131–201 C.E) had suggested that women whose

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Holmes, *African Queen*, 90.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003). See Renée Spitz, “Authority and Masturbation: *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 21 (1952): 490–577; E. H. Hare, “Masturbatory Insanity: The History of an Idea,” *Journal of Mental Science* 108 (1962): 1–21; Robert H. MacDonald, “The Frightful Consequences of Onanism: Notes on the History of a Delusion,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): 423–31.



menses was blocked or for whom marital sex was impossible should be permitted to touch their genitals in the interest of health. As Galen said, "the touch of the genitals" would result in "twitching accompanied at the same time by pain and pleasure" and the emission of "turbid and abundant sperm. From that time on," Galen concludes, the woman will be "free of all the evil she felt."<sup>64</sup> Albertus Magnus (1193/1206–1280) put a Christian gloss on this and considered masturbation a help in maintaining chastity: "Using their fingers or other instruments until their channels are opened by the heat of the friction and coition the spermatic humor comes out, and with it the heat; and then their groins are cooled off and they are made more chaste."<sup>65</sup> This is not to say that male experts were ever enthusiastic in their advocacy of female masturbation. The physician Lazare Riverius, (1589–1655), for example, mentions it as a cure for "madness of the womb," but cautions that "being a thing not so allowable, it may suffice whilst the patient is in the bath, to rub gently her belly on the region of the womb, not coming near the privy parts."<sup>66</sup>

This relatively relaxed view about female masturbation took a 180 degree turn in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to some experts the dangers of masturbation were far greater for girls than boys. This was the position taken by Dr. Samuel Gottlieb Vogel (1750–1837) in his *Advice for Parents (Unterricht für Eltern, Erzieher und Kinderaufseher wie das unglaublich gemeine Laster der zerstörenden Selbstbefleckung am sichersten zu entdecken, zu verhüten und zu heilen, 1786)*.<sup>67</sup> The American obstetrician Augustus Kingsley Gardner (1821–1876) credited what he described as the physical decline of American women to their widespread practice of masturbation. In fact, when it came to masturbation, he claimed that American women led the world, a fact remarked upon by foreigners:

Foreigners are especially struck with this fact as the cause of much of the physical disease of our young women. They recognize it in the physique, in the sodden, colorless countenance, the lack-luster eye, in the dreamy indolence, the general carriage, the constant demeanor indicative of distrust, mingled boldness and timidity,

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<sup>64</sup> Galen, *De locis affectis*. 6.2.39, ed. and trans. Rudolph Siegel (New York: Karger, 1976), cited in Lacquer, *Solitary Sex*, 93.

<sup>65</sup> Lacquer, *Solitary Sex*, 99.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholas Culpepper, Abdiah Cole, and William Rowland, *The Practice of Physick in Seventeen Several Books. . . Being Chiefly a Translation of the Works of. . . Lazarus Riverius* (London: Peter Cole, 1655), 419–20. See Rachel Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> For an excellent discussion of the war against masturbation in Germany, see Karl Heinz Bloch, *Die Bekämpfung der Jugendmasturbation in 18. Jahrhundert: Ursachen – Verlauf – Nachwirkungen*. Studien zur Sexualpädagogik, 11 (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 1998). See also, Jean Stengers and Anne van Neck, *Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror*, trans. Kathryn A. Hoffman (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

and a series of anomalous combinations which mark this genus of physical and moral decay.<sup>68</sup>

According to Gardner, once women indulged in masturbation, "Then farewell to female purity, to virtue, to anything worthy!"<sup>69</sup> Masturbating women were unnatural, perverse, even criminal. The English physician William Acton (1813–1875) claimed they took on the aggressive characteristics of men. The German homeopathic physician Wilhelm Gollmann insisted in 1855 that masturbating girls could become "tribades," parodying male sexual behavior.<sup>70</sup> Blurring the line between the sexes was considered such a dangerous possibility that some medical experts considered horseback riding, bicycling, and even the use of pedal-operated sewing machines dangerous activities for women.<sup>71</sup> Given over to the pleasures of solitary sex, women who masturbated were likely to eschew marriage and escape their mandated duty to engage in socially and nationally "useful" heterosexual sex and procreation. In an age when utility was highly valued and inextricably connected, as we have seen, with morality, the uselessness of masturbation for motherhood made it an especially egregious female activity.

Useless and immoral, masturbation was a sign of the utmost depravity, even criminality. According to Henry Maudsley (1835–1918), a noted nineteenth-century English physician, the masturbator was a criminal who was better off dead. Dr. John Laws Milton (1820–1898) considered masturbation a moral "conflagration" that endangered house and home. Dr Jonathan Hutchinson (1828–1913) suggested that "measures more radical than circumcision" would be a "kindness to many patients of both sexes," and this kindness involved removing the ovaries, testicles, and even the entire penis.<sup>72</sup>

Citing historical precedence in Egypt, the Persian Gulf, and Africa, the French physician Léopold Deslandes (1796–1850) claimed that it might be a good idea to "remove in infancy, from the vulva of girls, certain prominences which, at a later period, might prove inconvenient." He claimed that the operation "is not very

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<sup>68</sup> Augustus K. Gardner, "The Physical Decline of American Women," *The Knickerbocker* 55 (Jan. 1860): 37–52. Cited in G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 272.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Lewis Allen, "The Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution: Medicine, Morals, and Masturbation," ch. 5 *The Wages of Sin: Sex, Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 95–96.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Latou Dickinson, "Bicycling for Women from the Standpoint of Obstetrics," *American Journal of Obstetrics* 31 (1895), 24–37. Dickinson concluded that the benefits of bicycling trumped the dangers, but he recognized that the "horrible habit" of masturbation was not groundless." Cited in Allen, "The Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution," 96.

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan Hutchinson, "On Circumcision as Preventive of Masturbation," *Archives of Surgery* 2 (1891): 267.

painful" and is "easily performed," adding that "[i]t certainly would not be practiced generally if it caused severe pain, or was followed by bad consequences." While admittedly an extreme measure, Deslandes insisted that "when life is to be saved, or the mind is to be preserved, then we ought not to hesitate." Clitoridectomy, either by excision or cauterization, a method advocated by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg (1852–1943) among others, was a medical option with proven efficacy.<sup>73</sup> So much for the clitoris! It was expendable and, if necessary, had to be sacrificed for the good of the nation and the race.<sup>74</sup>

Given the evidence, it seems fair to conclude that the Cult of Womanhood was part and parcel of a new sexual ideology that developed in support of nationalism and imperialism on the international front and class antagonism at home. As Felicity Nussbaum has wittily commented, "the eighteenth-century woman climbs on the back of the 'savage' woman to her pedestal."<sup>75</sup> James Gillray's vicious cartoon "Un petit souper a la Parisienne" (1792) makes the nationalistic and propagandist dimensions of the Cult of Womanhood clear. In a graphic domestic scene he depicts the depravity of the rebellious "sans-culottes" by showing French parents as cannibals, who roast babies while their toddlers—chips off the old block, so to speak—eat human entrails (Fig. 6).

It is important, however, to recognize that the "savage" lived at home as well as abroad. The virtue and chastity of middle and upper class British wives was emphasized in the British press and British literature not only to distinguish the British from foreigners but to distinguish the haves from the have-nots at home.

With the growth of cities in the eighteenth century, the lower classes came to seem more menacing than ever before. Marlene LeGates emphasizes the way The Cult of Womanhood dealt with class issues by displacing sexuality and insubordination, characteristics associated with women for centuries, onto the lower classes. The morally superior, middle, and upper-class woman reaffirmed those moral values basic to a patriarchal, hierarchical social order. As Le Gates remarks, "the drama of the aggressive male checked by the virtuous woman is paradoxically a reaffirmation of the patriarchal authority of the family."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Léopold Deslandes, *De l'onanisme et des autres abus vénériens considérés dans leurs rapports avec la santé* (Paris: Lelarge, 1835). Translated into English as *A Treatise on the Diseases Procured by Onanism, Masturbation, Self-Pollution and Other Excesses* (Boston: Otis, Broaders and Company, 1841). Trans. also into Dutch, 1836. Delandes' and Kellogg's views are discussed in Allen, *Wages of Sin*, 102, 105.

<sup>74</sup> John Black, "Female Genital Mutilation: A Contemporary Issue and a Victorian Obsession," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 90 (1997): 402–05; H. Tristram Engelhardt, "The Disease of Masturbation: Values and the Concept of Disease," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 48 (1974): 234–48; Paul Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario, ed., *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary, and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>75</sup> Nussbaum, "'Savage' Mothers: Narratives of Maternity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," 132.

<sup>76</sup> Marlene LeGates, "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century*

Hogarth's "Beer Street" (Fig. 7) and "Gin Lane" (Fig. 8), both engraved in 1750, exemplify this correlation between good middle class mothers, who drink beer and care for their husbands and children, and their despicable lower-class counterparts, who selfishly squander their money on gin, get drunk, and shamelessly neglect their offspring.

The class specific nature of the Cult of True Womanhood is impossible to miss. The notion of the ideal wife and mother as soft, lacking in musculature, and virtually incapacitated for one week out of every four ignored the fact that the overwhelming majority of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were constrained to work. We are lucky to have the photographs of Arthur Munby (1828–1910), a most unusual English barrister, who had a passion for working class women and taking pictures of them, as we can see from the portrait of Munby and one of his models, Ellen Grounds, a woman who worked in the coal pits (Fig. 9). Munby's photograph of a milkmaid hardly suggests the delicate, soft creatures described by Barry (Fig. 10). Nor does the robust and proud fish wife (Fig. 11) appear enervated and virtually unable to walk. And what can one say about women who routinely worked in mines (Fig. 12)?

The difference in constitution between working women like these and the delicate creatures described by the medical experts appear so startling as to suggest that we are faced with two entirely different species, upper class women who eschewed sex for an idealized motherhood that required all their mental and physical energy and lusty, lower class wenches who popped out babies on their way to or from work. How else can we understand the pronouncements about the physical debility of women so routinely uttered by many eminent physicians of the period? To give one more example from Henry Maudsley, who, in addition to considering masturbators criminal as mentioned earlier, greatly admired the American physician Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell (1829–1914), made famous (or infamous) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935).<sup>77</sup> Maudsley claimed that whether young or old, married, unmarried, or widowed, their sex made it impossible for women to engage in any activity that might divert vital energy from their reproductive organs. Maudsley assures us he is not the least bit prejudiced. He is simply stating a "physiological fact," but this fact clearly has no application whatsoever to lower class women. While Maudsley appears to extol motherhood, the true nature of his feelings slips out. For as he says, "It can hardly be doubted that, if the nursing of babies were given over to men for a generation or two, they would abandon the task in despair or in disgust and conclude it to be not worth

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*Studies* 10 (1976): 21–39.

<sup>77</sup> In her short autobiographical novel, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, published in *The New England Magazine* in 1892, Gilman wrote a fictionalized account her mental breakdown while under the care of Dr. Weir Mitchell for post-partum depression.

while that mankind should continue on earth."<sup>78</sup> So much for the marvels of motherhood!

An even more revealing insight into the dark underbelly of the Cult of Womanhood had already appeared a century earlier. In 1738 Alured Clark published *An Essay Towards the Character of her Late Majesty* (1738), in which she eulogized the maternal nature of the late British Queen Caroline. Among the satirical rejoinders to this laudatory essay was *An Essay Towards the Character of the Late Chimpanzee Who died February 23, 1738–1739*. This satire makes no bones about equating Queen Caroline with the Angolan chimpanzee on display at Randall's Coffee-House, dressed in the latest Parisian fashions and noted for her tenderness to a human child.<sup>79</sup> Here we see that motherhood erases species difference. Motherhood is just that—motherhood—there is nothing specially human, lofty, or endearing about it. John Wesley hit the nail on the head when he claimed that describing childbirth as reproduction reduced women to the level of beasts. The satire directed at Queen Caroline implying that human and chimpanzee mothers were one of a piece was a forerunner of the idea that women were less evolved and closer to primates than men. This claim was widespread in the post-Darwinian world, which may explain the following peculiar works of art: John Charles Dollmann (1851–1934), "The Unknown," ca. 1912 (Fig. 13),<sup>80</sup> Emmanuel Frémiet, "Gorilla," ca. 1887 (Fig. 14),<sup>81</sup> and Otto Friedrich, "Vanity," 1904, (Fig. 15).<sup>82</sup> The assumption that women had a special relationship with primates is clearly implied in the following convoluted sentence from the great sexologist Havelock Ellis (1859–1939):

... it seems to be an indication of an abnormal interest in monkeys that some women are observed by the attendants in the monkey-house of zoological gardens to be frequent visitors. Near the Amazon the traveler Castelnau saw an enormous coati monkey belonging to an Indian woman and tried to purchase it; though he was offered a large sum, the woman only laughed. "Your efforts are useless," remarked an Indian in the same cabin, "He is her husband."<sup>83</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Henry Maudsley, "Sex in Mind and Education," *Fortnightly Review* (April, 1874). Reprinted in *Men's Ideas/ Women's Realities: Popular Science, 1870–1915*, ed. Louise M. Newman (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 79–87, here 82.

<sup>79</sup> Nussbaum, "'Savage' Mothers," 132.

<sup>80</sup> *Royal Academy Pictures* (London: Cassells, 1912). Picture reproduced from Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 290.

<sup>81</sup> Georges Ollendorf, *Le Salon de 1887* (Paris, 1887), 82. Reproduced in Dijkstra, 291.

<sup>82</sup> *Die Kunst* 11 (1904–1905), 441. Reproduced in *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 2 vols. (New York: Random House, 1936), 2, pt. 2, 84–85.

The German craniologist Karl Vogt (1817–1895) was not so hesitant. In his opinion, women simply were closer to apes than man:

We may be sure, that whenever we perceive an approach to the animal type, the female is nearer to it than the male, hence we should discover a greater simious resemblance if we were to take the female as our standard.<sup>84</sup>

The kind of statements delivered by male experts like Maudsley, Ellis, and Vogt, together with satires like the one equating Queen Caroline with a chimpanzee and illustrations linking women to monkeys have led some historians to argue that the Cult of Womanhood was simply a new strategy in the on-going struggle between the sexes. Marlene LeGates, for example, claims that the new view of women was not so much a new ideology as a new response to the age-old threat of disorderly women. The belief that women were castrating, uncontrollable, and sexually insatiable was still there, just as it had been at the height of the witch hunts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the new enlightened faith in the power of social conditioning to mold and improve the raw material of human nature suggested that the best way to approach women was with flattery rather than fists.

The change in the official ideology concerning women was, therefore, not a consequence of a new and positive evaluation of women. Nor was it primarily a reaction against the licentiousness of the aristocracy, on the one hand, or against the increasing cupidity and competition of the commercial world, on the other, as some historians have suggested. The new ideology simply represented a new strategy in the ongoing sex war, but, as a strategy, it had the added advantage of simultaneously dealing with another problem, that of the disorderly lower classes, as we have seen.<sup>85</sup>

All the famous heroines in eighteenth-century literature appear to be perfect exponents of the Cult of Womanhood and models of obedience to paternal authority. Samuel Richardson's two unmatched heroines, Pamela and Clarissa, are convenient examples. Pamela's successful self-defense against her would-be ravisher is a consequence of her parental and religious education. Deference comes naturally to Pamela. When asked, for example, to change the way she addresses her former master, aspiring rapist, and future husband, she serenely replies, "he shall always be my master; and I shall think myself more and more his servant."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Cited in Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 167. The idea that women were less evolved was commonplace. Herbert Spencer, for example, simply said that there had been "a somewhat earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men" (*The Study of Sociology*, 1873, 340), cited in Joseph A. Kestner, *Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth-Century British Classical-Subject Painting* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 8.

<sup>85</sup> Marlene LeGates, "The Cult of Womanhood in Eighteenth-Century Thought."

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (New York: Norton, 1958), 319–20.

There are, however, contradictions in the character and behavior of these heroines that challenge the idea that they are ideal representatives of the new Cult of True Womanhood and willing supporters of the patriarchal social order. Take Pamela, for instance. By the sheer force of her character and moral intransigence she manages to break through the class barriers that the Cult of True Womanhood was devised to protect. Until Pamela came onto the literary scene, the liaison between a master and a servant was the stuff of pornography or comedy and certainly never ended in marriage. Thus, while hardly a feminist in demeanor, Pamela's actions paradoxically embody certain values that later came to be associated with feminism.

In her book on women and the salons in seventeenth century France, Carolyn Lougee argues that the debate about women became so heated at the end of the seventeenth century because conservatives accused the women of the salons of doing precisely what Pamela did later. By advocating merit rather than birth and fortune, they encouraged the social mobility that conservatives held responsible for the erosion of traditional society and social values. Conservatives sought to prohibit women from filling public roles. Marriage and motherhood were to be the antidotes to *preciosité* since both roles would render women "invisible in their homes," as one male writer put it with anticipatory satisfaction. Another male reactionary suggested that the veil be reintroduced.<sup>87</sup> The Cult of True Womanhood must be seen against this background of hostility toward independent, assertive women.

The cloak of sentimentality enveloping wives and mothers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had severe rents which are nowhere more apparent than in the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), especially in his epistolary novel *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and in *Emile, or On Education* (1762). Both Julie, who is the new Eloise and therefore superior to the original one, and Sophy, whom Rousseau imagines as the perfect wife for his hero Emile, are trained to accept their entirely domestic roles. Their resignation, docility, and submissiveness does not come naturally, however, but had to be imposed on recalcitrant female nature. That most tender of all relationships, the bond between Emile and Sophy, or husband and wife, is based on a combination of brute force, fraud, and deceit. Sophy is required to appear to be what she is basically not.<sup>88</sup> When Rousseau describes the education suitable for Sophy and women in general, certain key words appear: "submit," "curb," "train," and "yoke."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Carolyn C. Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>88</sup> Nannerl O. Keohane, "'But For Her Sex . . .': The Domestication of Sophy," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 19 (July & October 1979): 390–400.

<sup>89</sup> "All their lifelong, they will have to submit to the strictest and most enduring restraints, those of

Such words strongly suggest the analogy drawn between women and animals that has been such a timeless literary conceit.<sup>90</sup> The significance of equating women and animals becomes apparent when one realizes that maintaining the boundary between man and beast was a fundamental preoccupation of moralists and philosophers starting with the Greeks. Animals signified base bodily functions and irrational passions, the very things that compromised man's rational nature.<sup>91</sup> Rousseau was terrified by what he identified as women's more-than-animal nature when it came to sex. At least female animals had limits to their desires, but this was not the case for women.<sup>92</sup> Were it not for the modesty and shame that had to be inculcated in them, what would stop women from destroying men with their sexual rapacity?<sup>93</sup> Evidently nothing.

Rousseau presents a terrifying picture of men dragged to their death by libidinous females. This will be the consequence, he warns his readers, if women

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propriety. They must be trained to bear the yoke from the first, so that they may not feel it, to master their own caprices and to submit themselves to the will of others. If they were always eager to be at work, they should sometimes be compelled to do nothing . . . [D]o not leave them for a moment without restraint. Train them to break off their games and return to their other occupations without a murmur . . . This habitual restraint produces a docility which woman requires all her life long, for she will always be in subjection to a man, or to a man's judgment, and she will never be free to set her own opinion above his. What is most wanted in a woman is gentleness; formed to obey a creature so imperfect as man, a creature often vicious and always faulty, she should early learn to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by her husband without complaint." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, translated by Barbara Foxley (London: Everyman's Library, 1974), 332–33.

<sup>90</sup> The analogy between women and beasts goes back at least to the ancient Greek poet Semonides, who devoted a long poem to the beastliness of women in the seventh century B.C.E. The dichotomy between women/nature/body/passion, on the one hand, and man/culture/mind/reason, on the other, encouraged the belief that women were somehow closer to animals than men. See Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture," *Women, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974). The association of women with animals helps to explain why witches were popularly believed to travel accompanied by "familiars," or small creatures, usually dogs, cats, rodents, or toads. Connected to the animal world by her female nature, the witch was clearly believed to have the power to co-opt animal powers for her nefarious ends. William Harvey actually dissected what was thought to be a witch's toad familiar. On this interesting act of dissection, see Keith Thomas, *The Decline of Religion and Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 524.

<sup>91</sup> For an illuminating discussion of the equation of women with animals, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 1983), 36.

<sup>92</sup> This was the common notion among late-medieval male writers as well, as expressed in countless *fabliaux*, *mæren*, and other short narratives; see the contribution to this volume by Albrecht Classen ("Sexual Desire and Pornography").

<sup>93</sup> *Émile*, 322: "Female animals are without this sense of shame, but what of that? Are their desires as boundless as those of women, which are curbed by this shame? The desires of the animals are the result of necessity, and when the need is satisfied, the desire ceases. . . . Impulse and restraint are alike the work of nature. But what would take the place of this negative instinct in women if you rob them of their modesty?"



are allowed to initiate sex: "... the men, tyrannized over by the women, would at last become their victims, and would be dragged to their deaths without the least chance of escape."<sup>94</sup> Men could not hope to survive in a heterosexual world unless social restrictions were placed on women that drastically restricted their freedom.

Rousseau was more paranoid than most men, but he was not alone in fearing female sexuality. A century earlier, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Robert Burton had complained of "woman's unnatural, insatiable lust," while Walter Charleton (1619–1707), a member of England's Royal Society and physician to Charles II, anticipated the dramatic rhetoric of Rousseau when he addressed women, claiming: "You are the true hiennas that allure us with the fairness of your skins, and when folly hath brought us within your reach, you leap upon us and devour us."<sup>95</sup> Even Diderot, who was sympathetic to women, believed that their inferiority was irremediably biological, and he was deeply ambivalent about female nature and sexuality.

On the one hand, he concludes that women are mysterious, which actually means that they are civilized on the surface but savages within. At other times, he simply defines femininity as a kind of mental and physical illness, anticipating the views of those nineteenth-century physicians previously discussed. As he says, "C'est l'organe propre a son sexe que partent toutes ses idées extraordinaire."<sup>96</sup> The identification of female sexuality with disease also appears in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Julie contracts small pox and gives it to her tutor and lover Saint-Preux. Small pox is a euphemism: it has all the properties of the contagion associated with sexually transmitted diseases. It is a visible manifestation of the secret, sexual guilt involved in Julie's and Saint-Preux's relationship. It is

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<sup>94</sup> *Émile*, 322.

<sup>95</sup> Cited in Brian Easlea, *Witch-Hunting, Magic, and the New Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980), 242.

<sup>96</sup> [http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Sur\\_les\\_femmes](http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Sur_les_femmes) (last accessed on March 31, 2008). "Sur les Femmes" (1772): "... rien ne pénètre jusqu'à une certaine pofondeur de conviction dans l'endement des femmes; que les idées de justice, de vertue, de vie, de bonté, de mechanceté, nagent à la superficie de leur âme; qu'elles ont conserve l'amour-propre et l'intérêt personnel avec toute l'énergie de nature; et que, plus civilisées que nous en dehors, elles sont restées de vraies sauvages en dedans, toutes machiavélistes, du plus au moins. Le symbole des femmes en général est celle de l'Apocalypse, sur le front de laquelle il est écrit: MYSTERE." On Diderot's attitude toward women and the attitude of the philosophes in general, see Elizabeth J. Gardner, "The Philosophes and Women: Sensationalism and Sentiment," *Women and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Eva Jacobs, et al. (London: Athlone Press, 1979), 19–27. Diderot's ambivalent, if not down-right negative, view of women was so wide spread among philosophes that Jean and Maurice Bloch are led to exclaim, "One might almost say that the eighteenth-century philosophers had a New Guinean view of women as dangerous because of her uncontrolled power and as potentially polluting and disruptive." See Maurice and Jean Bloch, "Women and the Dialectics of Nature in Eighteenth-Century French Thought," *Nature, Culture and Gender*, ed. Carol P. McCormack and Marilyn Strathern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 25–41.

important to note in this connection that in both English and French there is a linguistic connection between syphilis and small-pox: pox/small pox, la vérole/la petit vérole.

The Cult of Womanhood was basically a new ploy to deal with the age-old threat of disorderly women. The habit of separating women into two categories, the good and the bad predicated on the old Virgin/Eve antithesis, has a long history. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was resurrected in terms of the good wife versus the bad witch.<sup>97</sup> In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries The Cult of Womanhood developed and the good wife and good mother were pitted against lower class and foreign "savage" wives and mothers. But in every period these antitheses were never as clear-cut as one might imagine. The good wife and the good mothers are unable to separate themselves entirely from their negative counterparts. Clarissa Harlowe is a good example. She is constantly described as "angelic" in Richardson's text, yet she shares certain characteristics that were, as Rita Goldberg has astutely pointed out, attributed to witches in earlier centuries.<sup>98</sup>

Far from being the passive, docile, obedient, sexually submissive and undemanding female of the new mythology, Clarissa is supremely self-reliant, independent, and assertive. Her will cannot be broken or even bent by anyone. In Goldberg's analysis, Clarissa is nothing short of a triumphant witch, surviving the successive trials, interrogations, imprisonments, and mental tortures inflicted on her by her family. Her vindictive sister Arabella calls her "Specious little witch!" and faults her for "curling, like a serpent, about your mamma; and making her cry to deny you anything your little obstinate heart was set upon!"<sup>99</sup> Clarissa's magical effect on people is one of the reasons for Arabella's hatred. As Clarissa says, Arabella is convinced

That I half-bewitched people by my insinuating address; that nobody could be valued or respected, but must stand like ciphers whenever I came. How often said she, have I and my brother been talking upon a subject, and had everybody's attention till you came in with your bewitching meek pride and humble significance (I, 215-16).

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<sup>97</sup> Sigrd Brauner, "Martin Luther on Witchcraft: A True Reformer?" *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz. Volume XII Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc. 1989), 29-42; eadem, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany*, edited with an introduction by Robert H. Brown. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Allison P. Coudert, "The Myth of the Improved Status of Protestant Women: The Case of the Witchcraze," *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, 61-92.

<sup>98</sup> Rita Goldberg, *Sex and Enlightenment: Women in Richardson and Diderot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>99</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady* (Penguin Books, 1985), 195.

Lovelace also recognizes Clarissa's power: "All the power is with this charming creature," he exclaims, "it is I, not she, at this rate, that must fail in the arduous trial" (II, 142).

By the eighteenth century the witch craze was over and, on the surface, a new attitude toward women had emerged. Perched on their pedestals, middle and upper-class women sought to conform to the prevailing cult of the angel in the house. As Dr. John Gregory (1724–1773), a Scottish physician, medical writer, and moralist, informed his daughters, presumably with some sort of other-worldly, angelic model in mind, "the luxury of eating is," at least for women, "beyond expression indelicate and disgusting."<sup>100</sup> Of course, only a tiny percentage of females could aspire to angelhood: the rest were treated in many ways like the witches who preceded them. They were no longer burned, which was a significant advance, but they were thought to be infectious and polluting, and downright dangerous. Once again one finds the Mary/Eve split, although in the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century this was more likely to be expressed in terms of the sexless, angelic mother (who no longer had legs but "limbs") and the whore.

The "bad" Victorian woman possesses all the traits of the unruly, libidinous, sexually perverse, and promiscuous witches of an earlier age. Nineteenth-century art offers stunning examples of eerie, monstrous, and predatory women. Mermaids with their snaky tails, lamias, vampires, and femmes fatales were popular, and dead women a positive rage.<sup>101</sup> As Peter Gay has remarked, "No century depicted woman as vampire, as castrator, as killer, so consistently, so programmatically, and so nakedly as the nineteenth."<sup>102</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes described bedridden, nervous women—those very "neurasthenics" treated by Freud—as "vampires sucking the blood of the healthy people of the household."<sup>103</sup> As we have seen, the nineteenth century was obsessed with female sexuality, especially the kind of "useless" sexuality characterized by masturbation. Freud was more forgiving on this topic than some of the physicians previously quoted, claiming that masturbation represented a legitimate stage of infantile sexuality. Nonetheless, he made it absolutely clear that in order to develop into psychologically stable and sexually mature adults, women must relinquish clitoral

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<sup>100</sup> John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (Edinburgh: A. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1788). Gregory wrote this book in 1761 with the intention of leaving it to his daughters when he died. His son published it, however in 1774, and it became a best seller and went through many editions. In it Gregory advises women to hide any sign of education and learning they may have if they want to attract a husband. His views were later excoriated by Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

<sup>101</sup> Intriguingly, already twelfth-century artists working on corbels espoused similar viewpoints, see the contribution to this volume by Christina Weising.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, vol. 1, 207.

<sup>103</sup> Cited in Silas Weir Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Co., 1888), 8.

stimulation for the pleasure of heterosexual, vaginal intercourse, and the joys of marriage and motherhood.<sup>104</sup>

As William Monter wrote in 1977, whether women were tied to the stake as witches or put on pedestals and described as angels in the house, they were in both cases effectively marginalized. I would argue, however, that where witches died mothers survived. Not only did they survive, but some middle and upper class mothers turned the rhetoric of motherhood to their own advantage, using it as a wedge to gain entrance into the public sphere. But that is another topic.

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<sup>104</sup> But even those women who did the right thing and who married and bore children were not really sacrosanct. A new demonology emerged that is still with us today, the demonology of the "Bad Mother." Along with the invention of Motherhood came the maternal crime sheet, to use Wolfgang Lederer's apt phrase, and this has been used to explain a variety of psychological and psychosomatic disorders from schizophrenia and homosexuality to autism and anorexia nervosa. Wolfgang Lederer, *The Fear of Women* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).



Fig. 1: Jean-Baptiste Greuze, The Beloved Mother. Courtesy of The Art Gallery of New South Wales

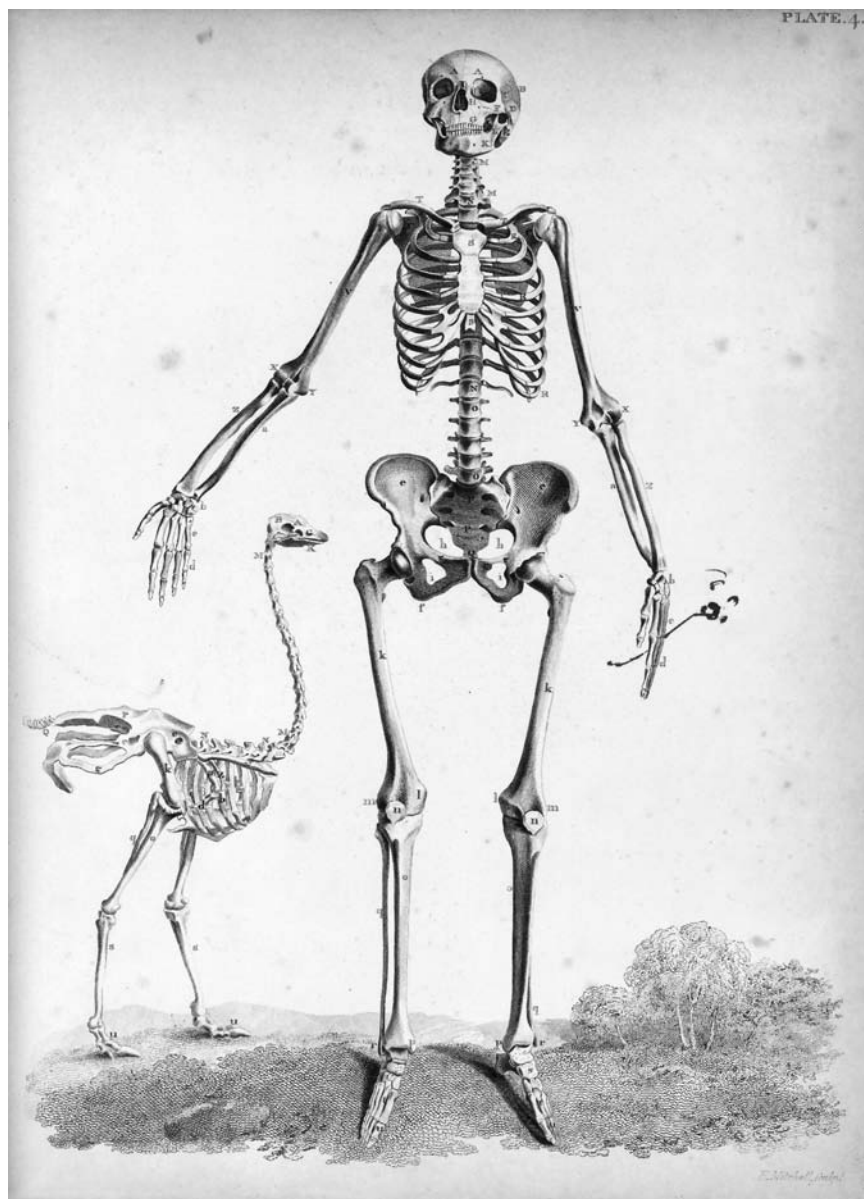


Fig. 2: Female Skeleton from John Barclay, *The Anatomy of the Bones of the Human Body* (1829). Wellcome Library, London

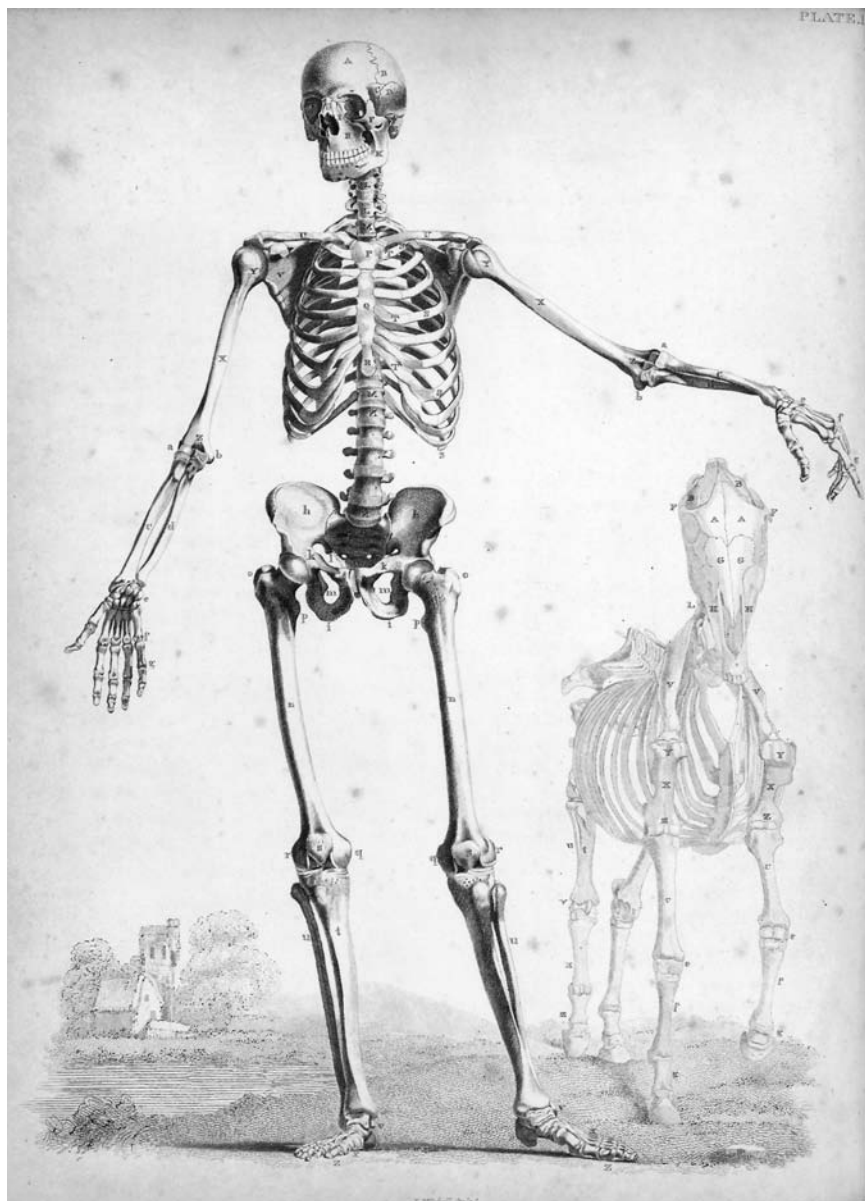


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Wellcome, Library, London



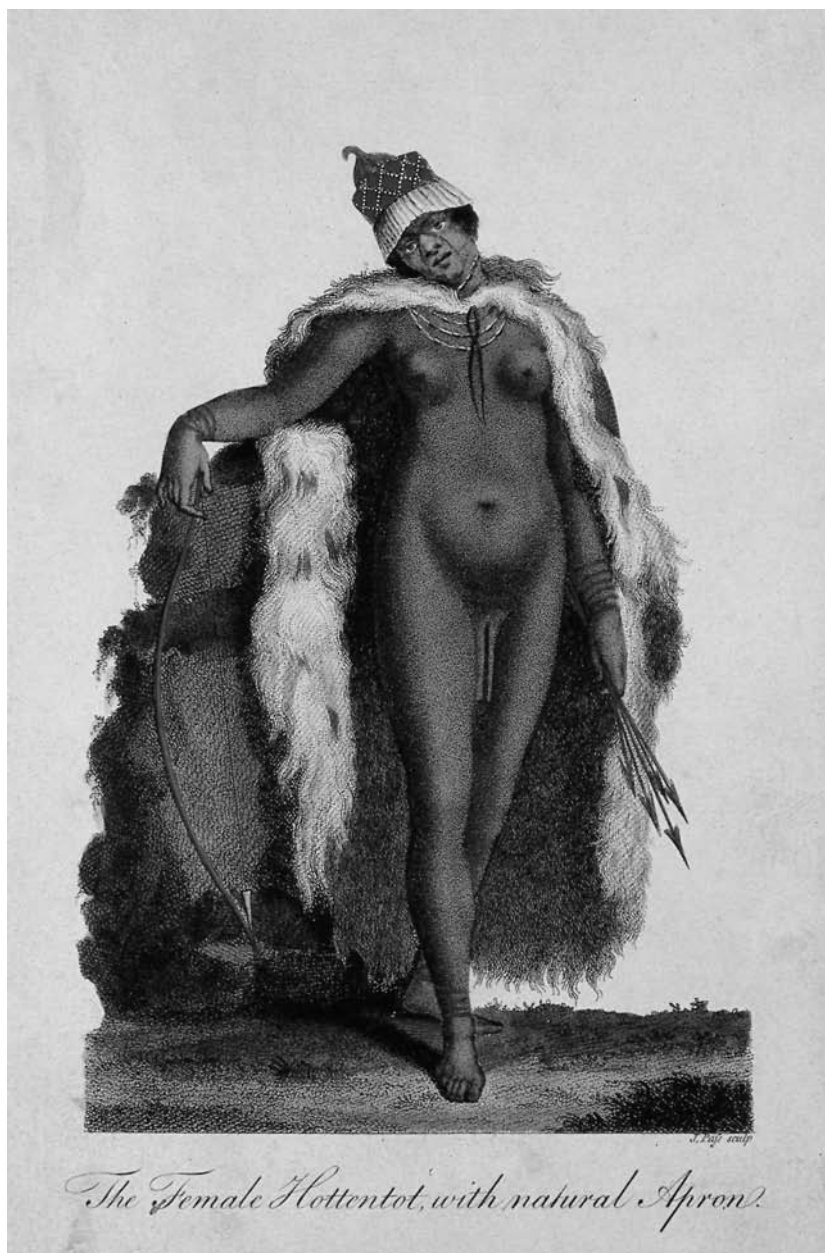


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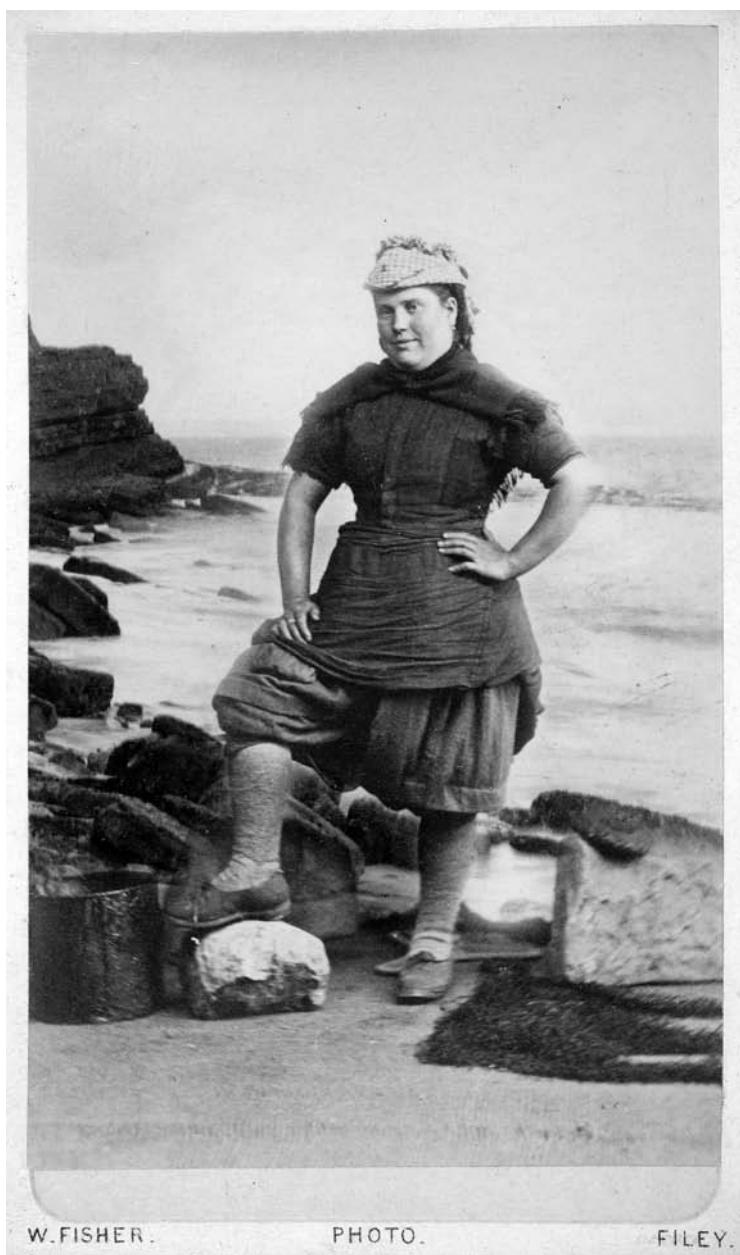


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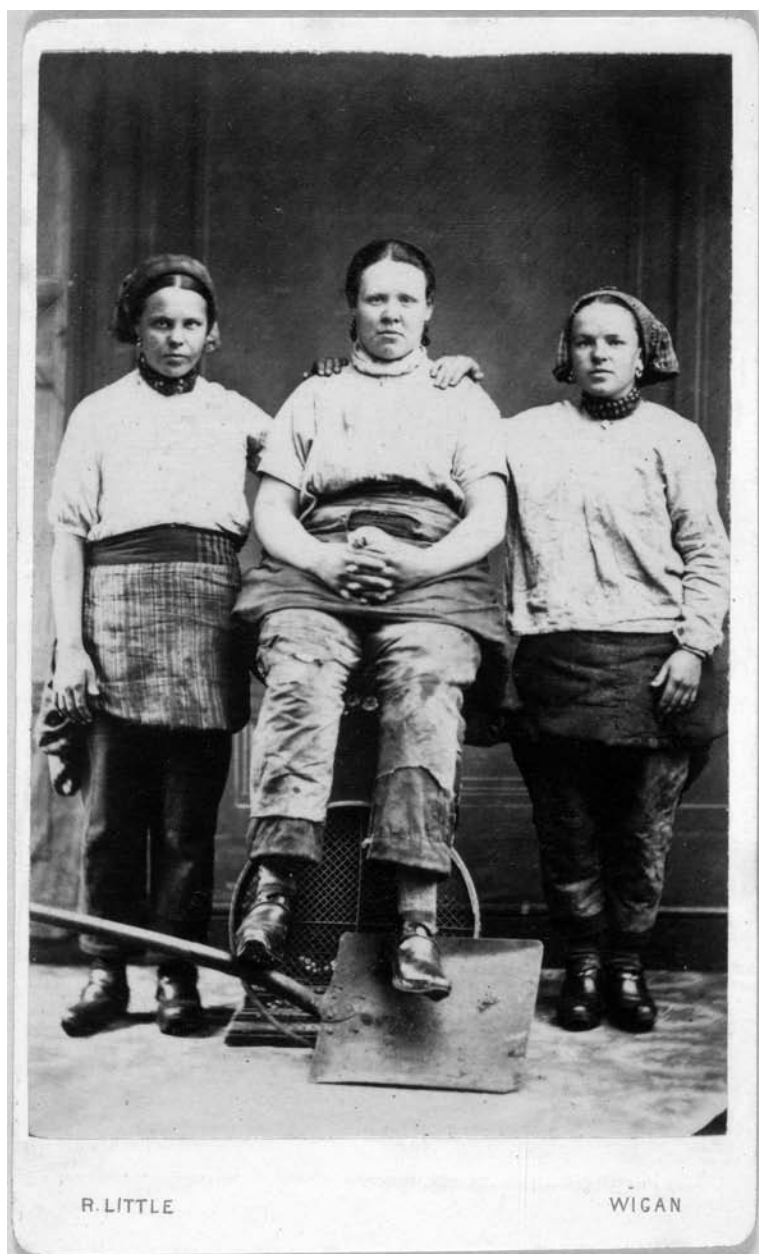


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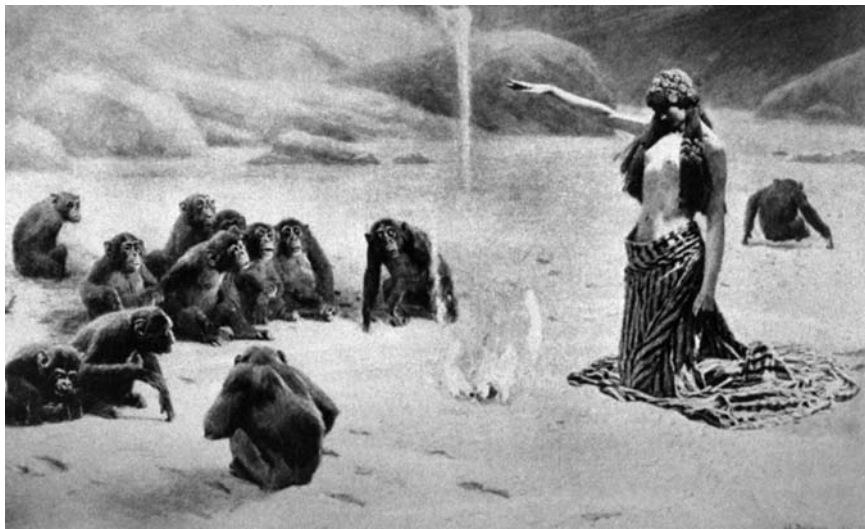


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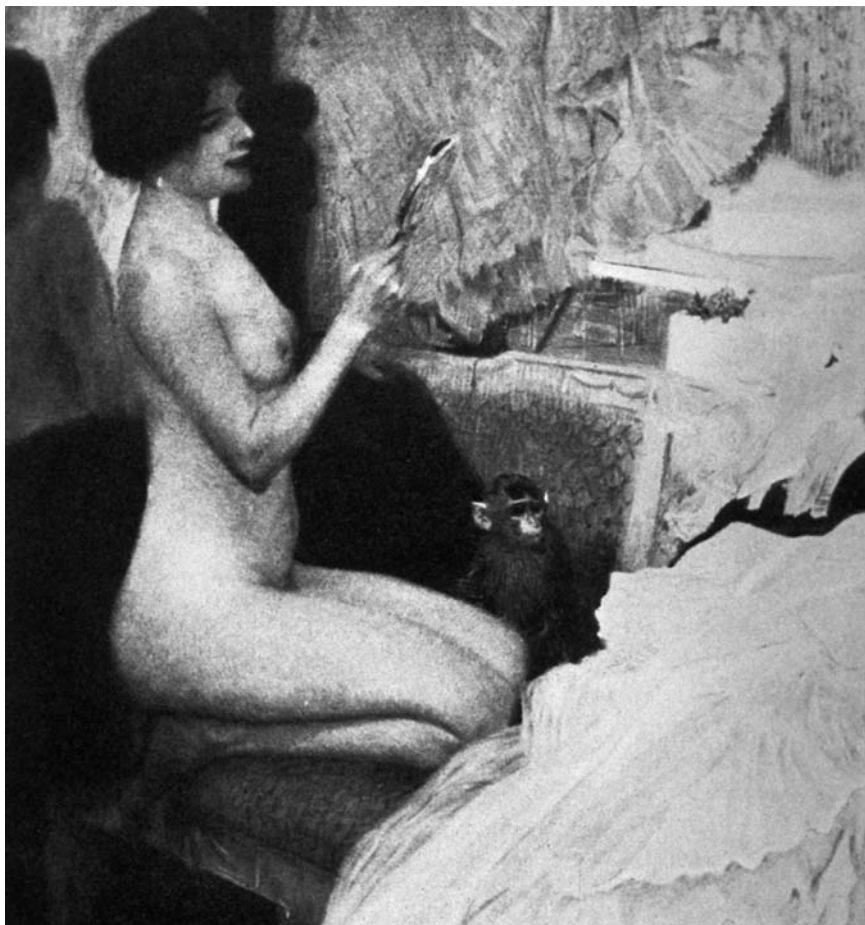


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